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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



October 2010

In Search of Questions

Vivekdisha: Knowledge in All Directions

Vol. 115, No. 10

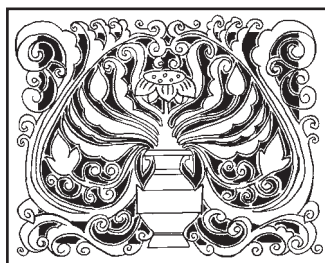


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Vol. 115, No. 10
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Amrita Kalasha

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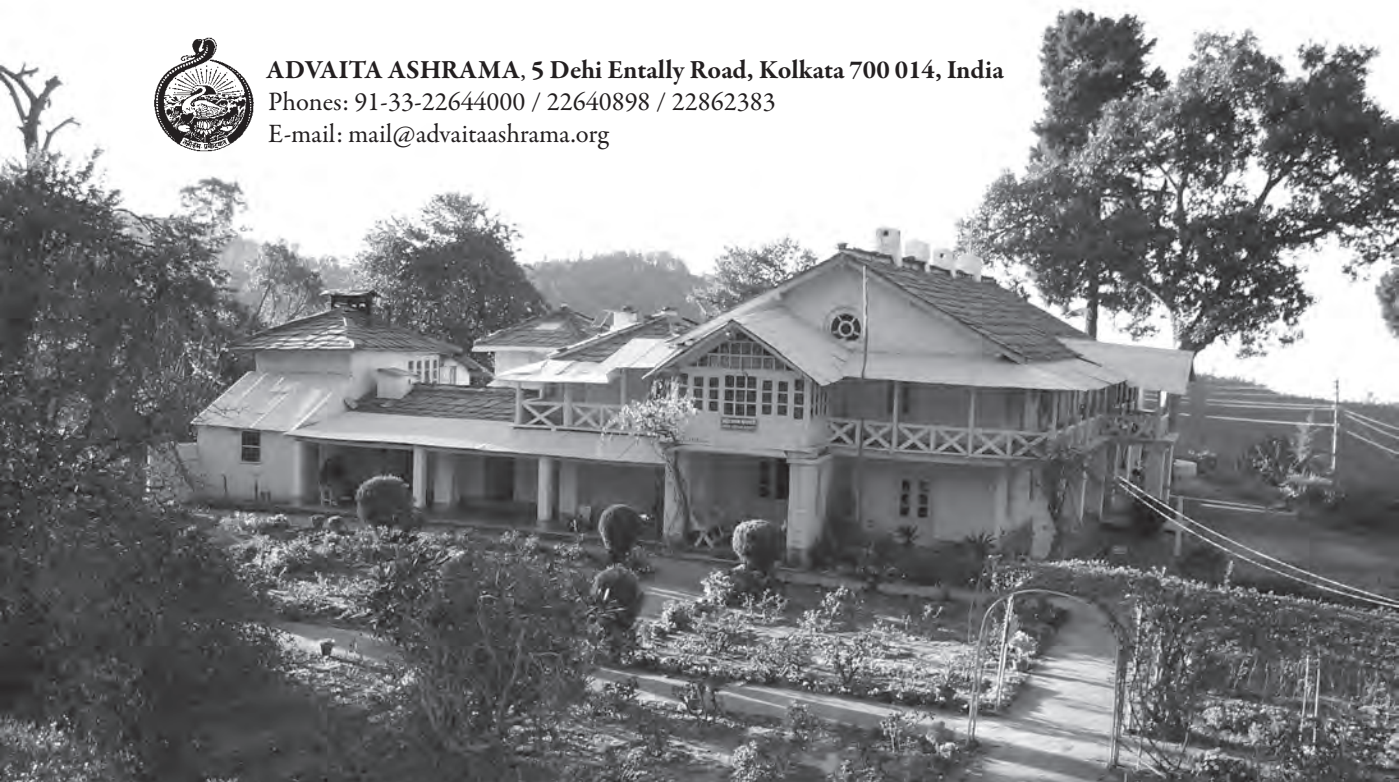
To accommodate these doctors we need to build a doctors' quarters cum guest house. On the ground floor will be the dining hall, pantry, reception, and the caretaker's room. On the first floor will be 8 rooms for the doctors. The second floor will have 6 rooms for guests and a meditation hall. The total cost of the building will come to around ₹ 60 lakhs. Please contribute liberally. Donations may be sent by Demand Draft or cheque in favour of 'Advaita Ashrama' to the address given below. All donations are exempt from income tax under section 80 G of the Income tax Act, 1961.



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उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

Pañditāḥ: The Wise

October 2010
Vol. 115, No. 10

तस्माद् ब्राह्मणः पाण्डित्यं निर्विद्य बाल्येन तिष्ठासेत् । बाल्यं च पाण्डित्यं च
निर्विद्याथ मुनिरमौनं च मौनं च निर्विद्याथ ब्राह्मणः ।

Therefore the knower of Brahman, having known all about scholarship, should try to live upon that strength (which comes of knowledge); having known all about this strength and scholarship, he becomes meditative; having known all about both meditateness and its opposite, he becomes a knower of Brahman. *(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 3.5.1)*

श्रीर्गुणा नैरपेक्ष्याद्याः सुखं दुःखसुखात्ययः ।
दुःखं कामसुखापेक्षा पण्डितो बन्धमोक्षवित् ॥

Beauty consists in such virtues as detachment. Happiness is the transcendence of pleasure and pain. Misery is the hankering after sense pleasures. The wise is one who knows both bondage and liberation. *(Bhagavata, 11.19.41)*

मूर्खो देहाद्यहंबुद्धिः पन्था मन्निगमः स्मृतः ।
उत्पथश्चित्तविक्षेपः स्वर्गः सत्त्वगुणोदयः ॥

A fool is one who identifies oneself with the body and the like. The right way is that which leads to Me (the Divine). The wrong way is that which disturbs the mind. Heaven is the rise of *sattva* (marked by knowledge and illumination). *(11.19.42)*

अर्थ महान्तमासाद्य विद्यामैश्वर्यमेव वा ।
विचरत्यसमुन्नद्धो यः स पण्डित उच्यते ॥

One who having acquired great wealth, learning, and power does not walk about with arrogance is known as a pandit. *(Mahabharata, 5.33.39)*

Wisdom lives in the heart of every living being, but we do not perceive it. ... The five sheaths of body, senses, mind, intellect, and ego are the five clouds [of ignorance] that hide the eternal wisdom that is within. Constant hankering to become omniscient proves ... that infinite wisdom resides in the heart of every man. *(Swami Ramakrishnananda)*

THIS MONTH

Learning Science may not be as natural or easy as it is sometimes taken to be in developed societies. This number examines some of the problems in science education and related areas and suggests means to address them.

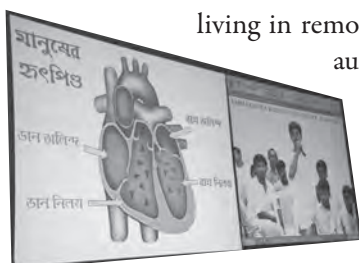
Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago gives us a glimpse into Brahmachari Tej Narayan's thoughts on 'Jnana and Bhakti in the Vedic Age'.

Though he has been **In Search of Questions** for long, Dr Chinmoy Kumar Ghosh has not found them easy to come by. As Director, National Centre for Innovations in Distance Education, Indira Gandhi National Open University, he has been stressing the need for student-centric learning that encourages questioning and argues for the same in his article.

Science education ought to be a process of training in observation and reasoning. It can be made interesting by studying the history of science and by engaging practical aids. This is explicated by Dr N V C Swamy, Dean of Academic Programmes, Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana, Bengaluru, in **Innovative Science Education**.

Vivekdisha: Knowledge in All Directions is a review of the recent tele-education and telemedicine projects initiated by the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University (RKMVU) for people living in remote areas. The report is

authored by Swami Narasimhananda, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, and Swami Divyasukhananda, RKMVU.



Swami Dayakarananda, Belur Math, highlights the **Importance of Vivekananda Study Circles in Educational Institutions** for the all-round development of the youth and calls for an increase in their numbers.

Sri R S Vaidyanathan, a teenage student from Hyderabad, presents in a capsule his thoughts on **Vedanta and Its Message of Fearlessness**.

Swami Prabhavananda, founder Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, concludes his reminiscences of **Swami Brahmananda**, a being soaked in God-consciousness and yet so very human—one who kept silently helping others.

In the eighth instalment of **Vedanta-sara** Swami Bhaskareswarananda, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, comments on the nature of transcendental Consciousness, the cosmic ignorance associated with it, and the origin of the universe and its constituents from it.

In the second instalment of **Mahendranath Gupta: Last Days with Sri Ramakrishna** Swami Chetananda, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, reconstructs some of the happenings during Sri Ramakrishna's stay at Shyampukur, Kolkata, in 1885.



Learning Science

AS A BOY OF FIVE, Raghunatha Tarkashiromani, one of the most astute logicians that medieval India produced, was asked by his widowed mother to fetch her some fire from the nearby Sanskrit school. When Raghunatha requested one of the students working in the kitchen for fire, the boy, deciding to have some fun, picked up a piece of burning charcoal in a ladle and asked Raghunatha to 'catch' the coal. Raghunatha had no container with him, but he had the presence of mind to scoop up some of the sand lying around and receive the burning charcoal on it. Vasudeva Sarvabhauma, the reputed master of the school, was struck by Raghunatha's quick wit and forthwith requested his mother to put Raghunatha under his charge for formal schooling. Raghunatha, of course, was not going to let his teachers do all the questioning. Even as he was being introduced to the alphabet, he had his first question ready, 'Why does *ka*, the first letter, precede, *kha*, the second?' It would surely have required some fundamental linguistic skills on the teacher's part to answer such queries, but the boy's future career would not have been hard for him to guess.

The new school of Nyaya, logic, that Raghunatha presided over was known for its great intellectual rigour. But it was constrained by its own presuppositions about the nature of the physical world. For science to flower, the ability to make generalizations had to be wedded to 'irreducible and stubborn facts' obtained by empirical observation and experimentation. 'It is this union of passionate interest in the detailed facts with equal devotion to abstract generalization which forms the novelty in our present society,' noted A N Whitehead. 'The main business of universities is to transmit this tradition as a widespread inheritance from generation to generation.'

Sir C V Raman, the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize in physics for his discovery of the change in wavelength of light passing through different media—an effect, named after him, that provides important evidence of the quantum nature of light—was one mind that brilliantly harmonized the spirit of observation and generalization. And Raman was a man of protean interests, besides being a gifted communicator. In one of his radio talks on popular science on mollusc shells, he urged his listeners to get infected with 'the enthusiastic admiration which I feel for nature's handiwork in this field.' 'The study of shells, fascinating in itself, becomes doubly so when we regard it, in its correct perspective, as the study of one of the most ancient forms of life on this planet of ours,' he continued. 'The forms, the sizes, the colours, and the architectural characters of shells are manifold in their variety and charm. But the mystery and the interest deepen when we ask ourselves why and how the humble mollusc builds for itself these forms of beauty.' Once one gets interested in shells, Raman observed, one soon realizes that their numbers are incredibly large—more than a hundred thousand species are known—and they range from microscopic sizes to half-ton clams big enough to serve as bathtubs. 'The variety of form and colour offered by molluscan shells is unsurpassed by any branch of biological life, so much so that the study of the subject becomes an adventure in itself.' And the adventure is universally accessible as molluscs can be found in one's garden as well as in ponds, lakes, and seas.

Shell enthusiasts have their basic lessons in chemistry when they realize that the shell is the same material as chalk and turns to quick lime, calcium oxide, when burnt—they were indeed widely

collected and burnt for this purpose only a few decades ago. The chalk crystals in their calcite form are mixed with organic matter that gives the shell its resilience. The rare aragonite form of chalk deposited in numerous microcrystalline layers makes for mother of pearl and in combination with the organic horny substance is responsible for its resistance to corrosives. Even a pearl has this structure and is primarily chalk!

This summary of Raman's talk gives a glimpse into the scientific mind that is curious about mundane objects, delves into their properties, finds associations that escape others, and discovers novel uses for them. But this alone does not suffice. In the physical sciences the generalizations that follow observations have to be expressed in the language of mathematics. And as J B S Haldane puts it, 'Most normal children are thoroughly bored by mathematics at school, and no wonder, considering how they are taught.' 'One reason for this boredom,' Haldane adds, 'is that they are given hopelessly artificial problems to solve, instead of problems which arise from their daily life.'

Richard Courant was one mathematician who made the subject interesting. 'For years the attic of the Courant house was filled with wire frames used in the soap film demonstrations' of Plateau's problem, which were 'a source of endless fascination for the grandchildren' several of whom went into 'mathematics and related pursuits'. Incidentally, Plateau's problem involves finding the surface of smallest area bounded by a given closed contour in space. A physical solution to the problem is provided by withdrawing a wire frame shaped in the given contour after dipping it in a liquid of low surface tension—say, soap water. Thus, if one uses a cubical frame one obtains a beautiful soap-film system of thirteen surfaces meeting each other at angles of a hundred and twenty degrees.

David Kolb and Bernice McCarthy have identified four different types of learners: (i) the imaginative, who perceive information *concretely* and process it *reflectively*; their favourite question is 'Why?' (ii) the analytic, who perceive information

abstractly, and process it *reflectively*; their favourite question is 'What?' (iii) the common sense type, who perceive information *abstractly* and process it *actively*; their favourite question is 'How does this work?'; and (iv) the dynamic, who perceive information *concretely* and process it *actively*; their favourite question is 'What if?' Researchers have also pointed out that 'students who do well in school tend to be the ones that learn either by listening or by reading. The focus on these two senses, especially at the high school level, tends to marginalize the tactile and kinaesthetic learners.' An inclusive learning system would be so designed as to help kinaesthetic learners learn 'by participating, moving, and talking', and tactile learners 'by doing, touching, and manipulating'.

It is important how science is taught for, as Bertrand Russell reminds us, 'the majority of our opinions are wish-fulfilments, like dreams in the Freudian theory. The minds of the most rational among us may be compared to a stormy ocean of passionate convictions based upon desire, upon which float a few tiny boats carrying a cargo of scientifically tested beliefs.'

'The scientific mood is especially marked by a passion for facts, by cautiousness of statement, by clearness of vision, and by a sense of the inter-relatedness of things.' Cultivation of this mood involves rigorous discipline. The way of science 'teaches individuals to persevere even in the absence of enthusiasm, to avoid self-deception, and to gain control of their thoughts and attention; it trains them to persist until they grasp a principle rather than stopping at partial solutions; it teaches them to notice how events are linked, to identify structures and rhythms not immediately apparent, and to leave behind a familiar world in order to visit another one, strange and impersonal.'

The discipline required for scientific pursuits is in many ways akin to the discipline needed for mastering Vedanta. By promoting genuine scientific learning we might also be aiding individuals to grow spiritually. And that, surely, is no mean gain.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 years ago

JNANA AND BHAKTI IN THE VEDIC AGE: October 1910

The heart is the crowning glory of man. Man is man because he owns it, otherwise what difference is there between him and an animal. It is the lamp of Sattva that lights his mind and shows him the path to immortality. If there be anything in him, more than any other, to indicate his innate infinite nature, it is the heart, and heart alone. Because it alone seems to partake of the quality of the absolute freedom of his nature, and will not be bound and thwarted by any law that this finite world can impose! Nay, it aspires to break down all the bars that nature herself has forged for man, and soar aloft, free as freedom itself! Therefore in it is the temple in which the Infinite Lord dwells eternally in man, and in it blossoms the sweetest flower that is ever acceptable to the Lord—Bhakti or devotion.

There is an eternal relation between man and man, and between man and God; and it is the heart which is attempting to assert the kinship, dulled though it might be by those extraneous influences of the world that separate man from his fellow-man and from God. The result of such influences becomes manifested as the *Ahamkara* or selfishness in man. Therefore for all purposes we can take this Egoism to be the cause of all this evil estrangement. But moments come into our lives now and then when the veil of selfishness becomes thinned within us and the true colour of the heart asserts itself in flashes of unselfish affection and real devotion towards man and God. ...

An undeveloped mind loves to enjoy the physical flush of beauty, its glamour appeals to his senses, while a developed mind with its long train of past experiences will set aside the claims of the surface-

charms of beauty and find its satisfaction only in the inner attributes of the mind. And a perfect mind will go beyond them even, finding them to be but imperfect reflections of the infinite beauty of the Soul, in whom alone is real and eternal bliss! Such a mind therefore will proclaim the goal of man to lie outside all attributes or *gunas*, in the *Nirguna*, the unconditioned—for their keen insight rends the veil of all name and form, and kisses the feet of the ever-beautiful in the direct perception of the Mother of all beauty!

Such is the history of the evolution of the ideals of man—first *Rupa-jamoha*, or inordinate attraction for what appears beautiful to the eyes, then the appreciation of the higher charm of the *gunas* or the internal qualities of the mind, and then the perception of the absolute unconditioned beauty, the *Akhandā-Ananda*! And when a man has come to this stage, then alone is he able to love for love's sake, for he sees the Beautiful equally in all, and thus becomes *sama-darshi*. Then, from the highest God to the lowliest worm that crawls in the dust, he loves all, he feels for all; he sees his ideal of beauty manifested in every atom of the Creation! Then to him the whole universe appears full, intensely, absolutely full, of the Beautiful, the Lord! He is the *Bhakta*, or the lover of God. His *Bhakti* or love manifests itself first in the concrete forms, gradually rises to abstractions, and then reaches finally to that unconditioned state where he sees the whole universe flooded with the light and the glory of the Lord. The whole world then appears to be but the living image of the Lord Himself! Thus from the beautiful *Pratikopasana*, or the worship

of concrete objects that remind him of the Lord, the Bhakta proceeds to the glorious *Vishvaruparchana*, or the worship of the universe as the image of the Lord; from worship in little temples made of bricks and stones, he rises to worship the Lord in the stupendous Cosmos; from the worship of particular images, or symbols of God immanent in Creation, he learns to bow down before this Universal Image!

These are the stages of the development of Bhakti or devotion, mainly classified into the two divisions of the lower and the higher, the *Apara* and the *Para*. Thus we see, the final states of Jnana and Bhakti are one and the same. The difference between them lies only in the means adopted to reach that goal: The Jnanin attempts to reach that state through reason or the intellect, while the Bhakta does the same through the culture of emotions or the heart. ...

The man of *Vairagyam* being free from the trammels of selfishness, views all as his own self, if he is a follower of the path of Jnanam, or looks upon all as the Lord's own, as his nearest and dearest in the Lord, if he is a follower of the Bhakti path—for *Vairagyam* is the *sine qua non* of both Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. The path of pure Jnana Yoga is not for all, as there are always in the world few such heroic souls who can breathe the air of its dizzy heights, who can discard the body idea from the beginning. Hence those ever-kind and compassionate Teachers of humanity who are worshipped in India as Incarnations of God, have preached the religion of Love, sweet in unbounded devotion and tender resignation, which is easy of access to any devotee aspiring sincerely and earnestly for it. 'Sweet is the Beloved and blessed indeed is the Creation in which He dwells everlastingly'—that seems to them to be its keynote. One gentle touch of the Lord, one sweet look from him, is immortalising. This apparent misery exists only to intensify the happiness, to sweeten the devotion, to draw the soul nearer to the Blessed Lord.

And the advice given, therefore, when the heart smarts under the deadly blows that fate ever inflicts, when whole nature seems to scoff at us without any mercy and the world appears like a dreadful cemetery

void of all that is loving and beautiful, is to seek shelter in the blessed feet of one or other of these Incarnations of God who were intensely human and intensely divine—the glorious Sri Krishna of the Pauranic age, the ever-loving Sri Chaitanya of a few centuries back, or last though not the least, the immortal Sri Ramakrishna, of our present day, whose kindly face glowing with intense divine fervour and whose cheering words falling like nectar from the lips that cursed none, are sources of unending inspiration to all who have seen Him, or have studied His unique life.

But one might well ask the question—without disparagement to these noble ideals of God-intoxicated men—Had India not the good fortune to enjoy, even as early as the age of the Vedas and the Upanishads, this ever-burning, maddening love for God and His Creation that we find in the later prophets?

Expressions of such intense devotion are to be found even in the Rig-Veda. In the eyes of those noble seers (Rishis) of old, the whole Creation was enveloped in a hallowed mystery of the immanent presence of the Lord. To them every part of it and indeed every object in it seemed bathed with His eternal beauty and every soul appeared to live and move and have its being in and through His divine mercy! To their beatific vision, the air appeared as the benign flow of His divine grace, fire as the symbol of His purity, space as that of His infinitude, the Vedas as His breath, nay, the very atom carried to them the presence of the divine love!

We find therefore in their living prayers an earnest beseeching for power to appreciate that love which manifested itself in this wonderful Creation—for what else could be the motive of the Deity to have projected this out of Himself, to have become Many out of the One? A mighty wave of love coming from the Deity Himself had spread its charm over their hearts, and His loving presence was realised by the seers in every object of Creation—in the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas, in the clapping thunder of the impetuous seas, as well as in the blue wide expanse of the heavens.

BRAHMACHARI TEJ NARAYAN



In Search of Questions

Dr Chinmoy Kumar Ghosh

*Tadviddhi pranipatena
pariprashnena sevaya;
Upadekshyanti te jnanam
jnaninas-tattvadarshinah.*

Learn it by humble reverence, sincere inquiry, and service; the wise who have seen the Truth will impart you that knowledge.¹

ONCE I GOT CAUGHT UP in a big procession in Kolkata. My situation was such that though I had not the least intention of joining the procession, I was carried by it. The crowd was shouting slogans: ‘*Bhenge dao, gurhiye dao*; down with it, finish with it’, ‘*dite habe, dite habe*; we demand it, demand it’, ‘*cholbe na, cholbe na*; it won’t do, it won’t do’, and the like. For a person like me who had entered into the procession by chance, it was not possible to make out what their demand was or what was to be ruled out. Out of curiosity, I asked someone: ‘*Ki chalbe na*? What is to be ruled out?’ The person got irritated and shot back: ‘*Prashna kara chalbe na*; questions are ruled out!’

Most of us take the path of least resistance; we jump on the bandwagon like that person in the procession and do not like raising questions. But if we want to know about something very sincerely and in detail, we need to probe deep into the matter by raising questions. Unfortunately, most of us avoid that. We neither like to raise questions nor like others doing so. In the field of education a teacher assuming this attitude presents a very serious problem.

Questioning and Innovative Thinking

I had the opportunity to go through a senior secondary student’s examination paper in physics. He secured more than ninety-five per cent marks at the examination. He had been performing consistently well at the senior secondary level too, with regard of course to the marks secured at the tests conducted by his school. His examination paper had also been evaluated by his private tutor, who was quite renowned due to the very high scores achieved at senior secondary examinations by students attending his tutorial home. However, I found various lacunae in the paper, such as spelling and grammatical mistakes and, most crucially, conceptual errors. These mistakes had either gone unnoticed or had been ignored. When I pointed this out to the student he admitted the mistakes, but expressed reluctance in showing them to his

tutor. On further probing I found that his tutor does not like being questioned, nor does he encourage raising questions during his class. If anyone is inquisitive in his class, he or she is discouraged not only by the tutor but by the peers as well, as they feel such questioning leads to wastage of time. Students and guardians alike are happy that the notes dictated by the tutor are good enough to fetch the much-desired marks at the examinations. So, who can question the authority of such a tutor? Moreover, if the students are given ready-made notes, they neither bother to read the main textbook time and again nor browse through the bibliographic literature. Though they are pleased with this system, such teachers do not realize they are doing more of a disservice to students than helping them.

Once I happened to visit a school and interact with students of the fourth standard and their mathematics teacher. The teacher was giving a lesson on length measurement in the metric system. When I asked the teacher about the status of knowledge acquired by his students, he replied that as the pupils had learnt everything and a class test had been scheduled for the next day, he was now giving a revision class. Then I asked the students: 'Do you know the relation between a kilometre and a metre?' All raised their hands and came out with the perfect reply: $1 \text{ km} = 1,000 \text{ m}$. 'What about the relation between a metre and a centimetre?' Again everybody answered perfectly: $1 \text{ m} = 100 \text{ cm}$.

The school was situated on the outskirts of a town and I was curious to know how the students commuted to the school from their homes. In that connection, I asked them: 'How far is your home from the school?' Now, not a single hand was up. And the question was about a distance they tread every day! Something similar happened when I asked the students to give an estimate of the length and breadth of the classroom, or to tell how many centimetres long were their pens. Finally, I asked them: 'Do you know how much a metre is? Can you show me your estimate of a metre?' They were extremely hesitant and not at all forthcoming with their replies. With some persuasion, however, some of them tried to

provide through body language their estimates of a metre, which was far from accurate. When the teacher was asked how these students, who knew the conversion factors with exactitude, did not know how much a metre was physically, his excuse was that he had not been provided with a metre scale by the headmaster! The whole episode brings out our insensitivity towards the practical applications of what we learn in the classroom.

On another occasion I went to the annual sports meet of a very renowned school in Kolkata. The school was holding the meet in a small rectangular field of approximately $110 \times 60 \text{ m}$. A famous school where students have to go through several stringent tests for securing admission ought to have given a little more importance to sports. We seem to have forgotten the advice given by Swami Vivekananda, who told some youth that they would be 'nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita'.² Nevertheless, considering that there is a heavy premium on real estate in a metro like Kolkata, we may not mind too much the field being small; the matter causing more concern was something different. In almost every sports meet the 100 m race happens to be the most popular event. The tracks for this race were drawn parallel to the length—about 110 m—of the ground. The ground was in a bad condition. Up to the hundred metres finishing line it was still passable, but beyond that it was atrocious. Stones and potsherd, which could cause injury to tender feet, were strewn around. A 100 m race does not end at the finishing line. The runners had to arrest their momentum within the available ten metres after crossing the hundred metres line. In the process most of them were falling down and getting injured. Later, I came to know that the chief organizer of the sports meet was a mathematics teacher. Surprisingly, it did not occur to him that the 100 m tracks could have been laid along the diagonal of the ground, providing thus sufficient cushion beyond the finishing line.

Another instance. I was having a session with the BEd students of a distance-learning institution. These students were all in-service teachers. Inter-

acting with the student-teachers on the issue of conducting quizzes at schools, I cited as an example the following question: If the equatorial radius of the earth is R , then which among the following is the closest approximation to the distance between the northernmost extremity of Kashmir and Kanyakumari: (i) $R/2$, (ii) $R/3$, (iii) $R/4$, (iv) $R/6$. Incidentally, $R = 6,400$ km (approx.), and the distance between the said places is about 3,200 km. So, (i) is the right answer. However, only one teacher came out with the correct reply. A further probe into the matter revealed that most of them knew the value of R but were not aware of the distance between Kashmir and Kanyakumari. They knew R because they had read about it somewhere. If they could remember it, they knew it. But the distance referred to might not have been documented categorically at a single place. It requires the knowledge of geography—or may be a little bit of imagination, working back from one's experiences of travels across India—but more than anything else it requires sensitivity towards measurement and practical applications. In any case, answers like $R/4$ or $R/6$ are definitely a cause for concern.

Sometime back in Kolkata I was listening to our next-door neighbour's daughter preparing for her ensuing examination. She was reciting a particular sentence time and again: 'Kolkata is a city situated on the banks of River Hooghly.' I asked her father whether this is the prescribed way to learn that Kolkata is a city situated on the banks of River Hooghly. Can she not be taken to one of the ghats and shown the river? She will readily realize that the city of Kolkata is situated on its banks. But the gentleman replied: 'You do not know. Unless she reproduces that very sentence in the examination paper, she will get a zero.' One cannot agree with such statements. A real teacher cannot be so prejudiced. Moreover, a student has to be assessed for his or her capability of comprehension, not of memory. It seems that the fear psychosis of parents and guardians, which percolates into the tender minds of their wards, adversely affects the students' mental attitude towards the process of learning. And this fear remains in the

students' minds, manifesting itself in one way or the other, throughout their studentship tenure.

All the above incidents suggest that learners often do not have the temperament to probe. They do not question. And most unfortunately, questioning in classrooms is generally discouraged by teachers. There are several ways and means by which learners can acquire answering skills—notes dictated in class, readymade answers to select questions provided in booklets available in the market, and so on. But what they really need to master is the questioning skill. One can thereby inculcate genuine scientific temper. This can be substantiated through examples taken from the lives of great persons.

Questioning behind Achievement

During his childhood, Albert Einstein would be amazed by the sight of a magnetic compass needle always pointing towards the north. He used to ask why it happened to do so.³ He did not get a satisfactory answer from his teacher, but at a later stage he made phenomenal contributions towards our understanding of the physical world, including magnetism. Among his other early questions and imaginings, perhaps the most interesting is the one related to the concept of relative velocity. He used to imagine travelling in a vehicle whose speed could be increased indefinitely. If he ended up travelling at the speed of light, he reasoned, he would see light come to a standstill.⁴ He sought the answer to this and many related questions and later arrived at the special theory of relativity, which revolutionized our understanding of physics.

Questioning and doubting accepted beliefs was part of Einstein's attitude towards life. The regimentation at Luitpold Gymnasium, the school he attended in Munich, created in him a deep-rooted scepticism about authority in general and academic authority in particular. For him scepticism turned out to be a virtue which he could cling to throughout his life. He used to say: 'The teachers in the elementary school appeared to me like sergeants and in the Gymnasium the teachers were like lieutenants.'⁵

All landmark discoveries in science have their

origin in questioning. Nicolaus Copernicus questioned the geocentric model of the universe. He proposed the heliocentric hypothesis, which was established through the observations of Galileo. Newton questioned: 'Does the moon fall towards the earth in the same manner as the apple? Are their motions guided by the same principle?' The outcome of his probing was the universal theory of gravitation. Sir C V Raman raised the question: 'Why is the ocean blue?' His urge for answers to this and many other similar questions led him to discover the Raman Effect. During the five years he spent on the *Beagle*—December 1831 to October 1836—the young Charles Darwin raised numerous questions and kept corresponding with almost everyone who he felt could help him with answers. The march towards his theory of evolution was a journey of experiential learning triggered by several questions.

The urge for learning through questioning is not restricted to the domain of scientists. There are also examples from other fields of excellence. Rabindranath Tagore did not have a formal education, but he was giving to questioning. I had the privilege of visiting a particular section of Rabindra Bhavan in Shantiniketan, where some of the books read by the young Rabindranath are kept. One of those books was on science and had a page with the description of an electromagnet. A Bengali note penned in the book by Tagore read: '*Khub jotil bishoy, na dekhle bojhar upay nei*; a very complicated matter, one cannot understand it unless one sees it.' It is indeed a reflection of his attitude to questioning and learning through experience.

During his quest for God, Swami Vivekananda approached many contemporary saints and sages and asked them: 'Have you seen God?'⁶ The important point here is not that of religious belief but of the directness of the question. Mahatma Gandhi never performed any experiment in a laboratory. He did not pick up acids and alkalis from bottles kept on the shelves of a chemistry laboratory. To perform his experiments, he picked these up from the realities of life.⁷ He raised plenty of questions and sought answers to them from the core of human existence.

Through these real-life examples we see that one should not accept anything without deep probing or without having one's doubts clarified. Therefore, one has to take the trouble to question.

The Scientific Method of Inquiry

The scientific method of inquiry lays great emphasis on questioning. This method is not restricted within the four walls of a laboratory; it permeates the realities of human existence. The method demands that one should make unbiased observations and raise pertinent questions when problems are found. Raising a proper question is the first step in the method. The next step is to frame a hypothesis as a possible answer to the question; the hypothesis, of course, must be testable. The third step is to test the hypothesis. And the fourth is to draw an inference either by way of accepting or rejecting the hypothesis based on the outcome of the test undertaken at step three. If the hypothesis is accepted then the answer is obtained, but if rejected an alternative hypothesis has to be framed and all the steps have to be repeated.

As a young man of sixteen, Galileo had observed church chandeliers swinging in a storm. He noted that longer the chandelier, greater was the time period of oscillation. He also observed that the time period was independent of the amplitude. He then asked the question: 'What is the nature of variation of the time period of oscillation with length?' He framed the hypothesis that the time period varies as the square root of length. Standard clocks were not available at that time. He measured time by using his pulse beat as monitor. Though the measurement of time was not very accurate, it could establish the correctness of his hypothesis. Later, the same result was derived from the laws of mechanics and also verified with more sophisticated methods to measure length and time.

The scientific attitude need not be restricted to the hard sciences alone. Proper questioning may throw light even on apparently non-rational and emotional issues. The following example is illustrative. Some staff members of a Kolkata office were

found to be habitual latecomers. The reason they gave for this delay was that their residences were far from the office. In this case the question to solve was the following: 'How to make them come on time?' The office first decided to take a welfare measure by plying chartered buses from different points. But there was no significant improvement in the situation. Consequently, the hypothesis that plying chartered buses would solve the problem could not be fully accepted. Something else was necessary. Thereafter the office conducted a workshop on 'Observing Good Practices in the Office', which demonstrated how the values of punctuality and regularity were crucial to success. After the workshop the situation improved considerably. Thus, the solution was a combination of both a welfare measure and the inculcation of proper values targeted at observing good office practices.

None Exempt from Questions

Thomas Alva Edison was a great inventor who had more than a thousand patents in his name. He did not receive a proper conventional education and so was not afraid of asking questions or challenging as-

sumptions. With regard to exploring the unknown he believed in the following ways: (i) Do not have a biased or a prejudiced mind, (ii) always have an open mind towards questions, (iii) patience and perseverance pays, and (iv) nothing is final.

The last dictum is indeed crucial. No process of exploration has a fairy-tale ending. New findings throw further light on the process of seeking answers to questions raised at every stage of the discovery. And this can be verified not only from researches conducted in the physical sciences, but in the social sciences as well.

There is an interesting anecdote about the upbringing of Isidor I Rabi, the 1944 nobel laureate in physics: 'When all his friends growing up in Brooklyn came home from school their mothers asked them, "So, what did you learn today?" But not his mother. When he came home his mother asked, "Izzy, did you ask a good question today?"'⁸

It has been suggested that 'thoughtful literacy is characterized by students who can read, write and think in the complex and critical ways needed in a post-industrial democratic society'. In other words, he encourages students to be analytic and critical



while exploring a subject which only a positive attitude towards questioning and rational thinking can ensure. Edwin G Ralph points to the importance of questioning in philosophy and religion: 'From ancient times notable teachers such as Socrates and Jesus have employed oral-questioning to enhance their discourse, to stimulate thinking, and/or to stir emotion among their audiences.'⁹

The famous US educationist and critic Neil Postman, who through his several writings has been quite critical about the lacunae of the present US education system and the adverse effects of greater emphasis on technology than culture and traditions, has made a significant statement about the role of questioning: 'Everything we know has its origin in questions. Questions, we might say are the principal intellectual instruments available to human beings.'¹⁰

In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* there is an account of the importance given to questioning by Sri Ramakrishna. He had come to Benimadhav Pal's house at the Sinthi Brahmo Samaj. Among the Brahmo Samaj members assembled there was one sub-judge who asked Sri Ramakrishna: 'Sir, does God show more grace to one than to another? If so, He can be accused of the fault of partiality.' Sri Ramakrishna accepted the question with grace and started discussing the issue at length in his own style. Another Brahmo devotee, out of impatience, asked the sub-judge: 'Why don't you accept what he says?' A visibly annoyed Sri Ramakrishna said sharply to the Brahmo devotee: 'What sort of man are you? To accept words without conviction! Why, that is hypocrisy! I see you are only a counterfeit.' The said devotee realized his mistake and felt quite ashamed.¹¹ Sri Ramakrishna was not a teacher in the common sense of the term; he did not teach in a classroom. But he was a teacher of teachers, a true educationist.

All the educationists mentioned above have laid particular emphasis on questioning. We are used to a classroom system where the teacher asks questions and the students reply. Attempting a reversal of roles raises eyebrows, as it is feared that students would be crossing their limits. This fear is a reflec-

tion of minds that discourage questioning. Such fears are unfounded, and it must be reiterated that the thinking faculty of students and their urge to question should never be discouraged.

In conclusion, let me recall another personal experience. Most of the primary schools in rural India are still managed by only one teacher. He or she heads the institution, maintains discipline, and gives lessons in all subjects—language, mathematics, science, and some others. In one such school the students of class one were being taught mathematics. The teacher was explaining subtraction, and the example chosen was '72 minus 45'. The teacher stated that 'since the unit place digit of the subtrahend is greater than that of the minuend, we have to take 1 as loan from 7 at the ten's place to get 12, which enables the subtraction of 5'. Before the teacher could proceed any further a bright young girl stood up and said: 'Teacher, in the previous language class you said that taking loan is a misdeed and it should be avoided.' The teacher was visibly perplexed by this interruption and somehow managed to provide a reply—which might, or might not, have satisfied the girl. Seeing this my reaction was twofold. First there was a feeling of shame, as I was carrying in my pocket a credit card of a multinational bank, and second a sense of respect for the girl. I realized that the thinking capabilities of a learner should never be underestimated.

Development of questioning skills is central to the paradigm shift from teaching to learning, as proposed by the UNESCO.¹² To give true shape to this scheme we would definitely require support from the government, but more than that we shall have to generate awareness among guardians, teachers, non-academic members of staff, and all people concerned, including you and me. Questioning must become a very significant part of all teaching-learning transactions. The onus lies with the students, and in a very subtle way with the teachers and guardians as well. We need to always remember the dictum: 'There cannot be a high priest who cannot be questioned.'¹³



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Innovative Science Education

Dr N V C Swamy

Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life.

—Swami Vivekananda

THIS INSIGHTFUL STATEMENT IS as valid today as it was when first made more than a hundred years ago. It is not merely a statement on the psychology of education but is, sadly, an indictment of our present education system. The programme of school and college education followed in India today is based on what is known as the ‘Macaulay system’. It was introduced here in 1836, the same year that Sri Ramakrishna was born. Since then it has undergone cosmetic changes, but in essence it remains the same.

In Macaulay’s time India was still being ruled by the East India Company. The company used to bring clerks and lawyers at great cost from England. It was a masterstroke on Macaulay’s part

to develop a system that could train ‘natives’ to qualify as clerks and lawyers. All that these people had to do was to follow their masters blindly and imitate them to the best of their capacities. It is no wonder that India’s bureaucratic and legal system inherited from the British is so archaic. An outsider can have a flavour of this by watching the BBC television series ‘Yes Minister’ and ‘Yes, Prime Minister’ and reading Charles Dickens’s famous novel *Bleak House*.

The same is the case with the educational field. Between Macaulay’s time and its independence, India was a British colony. Many innovations were introduced in England in diverse areas during this period. Most did not percolate down to India, since the British Government did not think they were needed by a slave nation. Not only that, this process of transfer of innovations was even positively discouraged.

With independence, India was free to introduce necessary changes. This was done in certain areas of technology—atomic energy, space science, medicine, and lately information technology. But in many other fields, like education, things continue to be just as they were six decades ago. This is even more true of science education.

Why is India, with a population of more than a billion, not able to produce Nobel Prize winners? This is a very commonly asked question. Even those people of Indian origin who have been awarded the prize in recent years have been honoured for the work they did abroad, especially in the United States. A country produces giants in those fields that it respects most. Ancient India respected knowledge and produced great thinkers. So did ancient Greece. Ancient Rome respected power, and it produced great generals. Medieval Europe respected art, and so it gave rise to a galaxy of composers and artists. One need not make any guesses as to what modern India respects!

Even though science as we know it today had its origins in ancient Greece, it really came into full bloom in Europe during the Reformation and Enlightenment, when it was freed from the stranglehold of the Roman Catholic Church. Since then it has not looked back. This is the science that is taught in schools and colleges all over the world today.

Several eminent Indian scientists—Professors M G K Menon, Raja Ramanna, and recently C N R Rao—have been bemoaning the neglect of science in India. In response, the government of India has recently established some new institutions in different parts of the country with the objective of promoting advanced scientific teaching and research. This is indeed a welcome move. But this measure seems to address the problem from the wrong end. The basic problem lies elsewhere: at the very root of science education, at school and college levels. One ought to address the problem at these levels to make any meaningful impact.

Science in Schools

How is science being taught in Indian schools

today? Any parent who has gone through the homework notebook of children would have noticed the excessive emphasis on solving numerical problems. The children miss the thrill of discovering things by themselves. Science is taught as if it were something that can be found only between book covers. Science is there all around us; but we hardly notice it because we have not been trained to do so.

There is an interesting anecdote told in this connection. A father and his young son went for a walk one evening. Very soon dense clouds gathered and it started raining heavily. They took shelter under a huge tree, waiting for the rain to stop. The father thought he would use this wait to teach his son something about the four cardinal directions. The boy quickly learnt how to identify the directions correctly, which pleased the father immensely.

Presently, the rain stopped and they returned home. The proud father told the boy's mother about his achievement in identifying the cardinal directions. The mother too was pleased. She asked the boy, 'Son, which way is east?' The boy promptly replied, 'Let us go back to the tree.'

This is the result of science education in our schools. It is rarely impressed upon the minds of children that science is there all around us. It is just a question of keeping one's eyes and ears open and using the mind to connect the gathered facts. Science education ought to be a training in observation rather than learning formulae by rote and solving numerical problems.

One comment that teachers make in this regard is that there is no way of testing the comprehension skills of students except by an oral examination, which is not generally provided for in our examination and evaluation system. This is true. But it does not mean that all classroom teaching should be geared towards examinations. That is why most students consider education a burden and a necessary evil to be tolerated to get on in life.

Suppose a student has studied well for an examination and is in a position to complete it successfully. If the same question paper were to be given

to him or her after a month, how well would the student be able to perform? This is the criterion to decide whether the student has been able to properly absorb the subject or has acted as a machine reproducing facts.

Making Science Interesting

How can one make science learning interesting at school and college levels? This is a question often asked by educationists all over the world. This is not a situation faced by India alone. A little more than fifty years ago the same issue was discussed in detail by the professors of physics at the California Institute of Technology. They noted that students join science courses with great expectations because they have read and heard about it so often. But as soon as they start attending classes they lose their interest—the lessons are so mundane and routine that they miss the joy of learning.

The solution the professors arrived at was very interesting. It was felt that a single teacher—supported by other professors, who would offer tutorial sessions to smaller groups—should conduct the lecture classes for all students. New experiments were to be devised to illustrate the phenomena studied. A set of questions would also be prepared for use in discussion sessions. All the lectures were to be recorded on tape for possible compilation as a book. It was also suggested that Professor Richard Feynman be requested to give the physics lectures throughout the three-year course.

The project was implemented only once, and elicited mixed reactions. Feynman himself said that if there were an opportunity to repeat the course he would do it somewhat differently. But his colleagues were of the opinion that the experiment was a resounding success. Without losing any time they brought out the printed version of the lecture series in three volumes, which soon became famous as the *Feynman Lectures on Physics*. Even after a lapse of fifty years the book has not lost its popularity and is still a best-seller.

Why was Feynman chosen to give the lectures? He was an extraordinary genius in physics, a Nobel

Prize winner, a charismatic personality, but more than anything else he had the knack, like Swami Vivekananda, of making complicated things simple and easy to grasp, without compromising on fidelity. As one reads through his books, one feels as if Feynman is holding a personal conversation with the reader!

About a decade ago the government of Karnataka had a progressive-minded secretary of education. He came up with a scheme for commissioning eminent professors in various disciplines of science to prepare videos of classroom lectures in their specialties, both in English and Kannada. The format was that of the Feynman lectures. The idea was to distribute the videos free to school and college libraries, so that they could be shown to students to supplement their classroom learning. Many academicians in Bangalore evinced keen interest. But before the details could be worked out, the secretary was transferred to another department. The new secretary considered this project a wasteful expenditure and promptly shelved it. No wonder, nothing innovative can be expected from the bureaucracy.

Science is studied under several disciplines. Its language is mathematics. Every one of these disciplines abounds in a galaxy of giant brains in the form of discoverers and inventors. No scientific discovery or invention takes place in a vacuum. There are always human beings behind them. This fact is hardly ever emphasized in science teaching. The subject is taught as if it fell out of the heavens in a nice gift parcel. There is a lot of agony and ecstasy behind every discovery or invention. It is high time that the science curriculum at school and college levels incorporated this element also: the historical development of science and the role played by scientists. This needs some elaboration, for there are several reasons why this ought to be done.

History of Science

Scientists are the product of the era they live in. The prevailing social, political, and religious conditions affect them as much as they affect others. They also

respond to these conditions, though in their own way. After all, they too are human beings. Some of them bury themselves in their scientific pursuits and ignore the outside world, or compromise with it. There are others who raise their voices against prevailing injustices, since their scientific background has given them a better perspective on the world. There are several such instances available, of which a couple are cited here.

During the Middle Ages in Europe virtually all European nations were under the control of the Roman Catholic Church. Freethinking was frowned upon; dogma ruled the people and the Pope and the Church were considered infallible. The Earth was thought to be the centre of the universe, with all the planets and the Sun taken as satellites revolving around it. This geocentric thesis had been inherited from the teachings of Aristotle, which had been accepted by the Church *in toto*. Speaking against it was considered anathema and was punishable by death. The Spanish Inquisition, aimed at suppression of all heretical thinking, was all-powerful and became a nightmare for the common people.

What was the response of the scientists? Some of them buried their heads in the sand like ostriches, fell in line with the dogma, and tailored their teachings to suit the Church. But there were a handful of others—great thinkers—who subjected the dogma to critical examination. They had at their disposal recent astronomical observations proving the exact opposite, that the Sun was at the centre of the solar system, and that the Earth, like other planets, revolved around it. Some of them spoke out against the dogma, running the risk of excommunication and even death. One of them, Giordano Bruno, was burnt at the stake. Copernicus, who provided the logic for the heliocentric thesis, escaped the Inquisition by dying a natural death before the Pope came to hear about his book!

Ultimately, this madness was checked with the advent of Martin Luther, who was as devout a Christian as the Pope, but who refused to accept him as the final authority. Luther started the

Protestant movement by translating the Bible into German and having it published. The kings of the north European countries were the first to jump at this opportunity and embrace the new movement. This liberated their people from the clutches of the Inquisition and the Catholic Church. Science flourished, and has never looked back.

If students are not made aware of these historic developments, they will have no proper appreciation of how science has grown. We have to remember that science is not a frozen fossil. Its growth is not a miracle. Every social or political upheaval has had its impact on scientific development. Science cannot be studied in isolation from these influences. Otherwise, it will become what it has become today, a dull dead subject.

Why are most scientists considered atheists today? This is a legacy from the Middle Ages in Europe, when the Church had persecuted scientists for their liberal ideas. Scientists abhor such persecutions, since they know that science can survive only in a free atmosphere where one can fearlessly express his or her opinion. This has given rise to a piquant situation in our country, where most scientists have faith in God, even though they are shy to admit it.

The following anecdote illustrates this dichotomy. A schoolteacher teaches his students in the morning class, in detail, about how a solar eclipse takes place. He then applies for leave in the afternoon to go home and perform a ritual, for there is a solar eclipse in the afternoon. The teacher has to take a bath and offer oblations to the sun, to rescue himself from the clutches of Rahu, the mythical demon that devours the sun, causing an eclipse!

The Dilemma of Consciousness

The above anecdote may appear to be a joke, but that is precisely the situation faced by many quantum scientists today. This dilemma of quantum physics is a thrilling story, but it hardly finds a place in the curriculum at undergraduate or postgraduate levels. This is still an evolving story, with some of the best brains around the world engaged in it. It

is sad that most of our students are deprived of its taste. The story can be recounted here briefly.

It started about a century ago in an innocuous way with the debate as to which is more fundamental, matter or radiation, energy. Newton's laws apply to matter and Maxwell's to radiation. Maxwell's equations could not be fitted into the framework formulated by Newton. It took the genius of Einstein to see what happens when Newton's equations are fitted into the Maxwellian mould. The consequence was the emergence of the special and general theories of relativity. Meanwhile, Max Planck had demonstrated that energy exchange takes place in discrete packets, called quanta, thus giving birth to the new quantum theory and its by-products, quantum mechanics and quantum electrodynamics. As the cliché goes, the world has never been the same again.

Quantum physics finds itself in a fix today. Science has always been dealing with the inanimate world, except for biology. Even the latter is today being expressed in the language of the physical sciences. Quantum physics is facing a dead end today. No matter what it does, it has not been able to give a satisfactory explanation for the wave-particle duality and the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen paradox of information travelling faster than light, which is forbidden by the special theory of relativity. The only viable solution found so far invokes human consciousness. This debate has been raging for several decades, but very few textbooks even make a passing reference to it.

About a decade ago this author started offering a course on 'Science and Consciousness' at the Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana, a deemed university in Bangalore. The first part of the course, spanning a quarter, introduced consciousness as understood in Vedantic literature. The rest of the course took the students on a journey through history, from the period of the Greeks to modern times. The course talked about the growth of science in the historical context, with the lives of prominent scientists and their contributions kept in focus. The feedback from students belonging to diverse disciplines has been very positive, and the

course is now offered to all students at the master and doctoral levels.

The following question then arises: Should such a course form an integral part of science teaching, or should it be offered separately? The author's opinion is that such a course covering all major disciplines of science, whether physical or biological, should be offered in detail after the foundations have been laid in the traditional manner. Even while doing so, an element of history of science should be introduced at the basic level itself, the details being provided later. During his tenure at the Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, the author successfully implemented this programme in his courses on fluid mechanics and aerodynamics. It is possible to do so, and it is high time it were done. There is no dearth of books on this subject. A simple search will yield at least half a dozen excellent texts.

There are also several supplementary aids available today for science education. The National Geographic has brought out several CDs on various topics in science to help students grasp fundamental principles. Many organizations have brought out DVDs about the environment, plant life, marine creatures, weather, and global warming. All these make the study of science a joy and a rewarding experience. What is needed is the will to make these widely available and to utilize them.

Talking and Appreciating Science

Science is an adventure of discovery, invention, and innovation. It is an ever-growing discipline. It impinges on every aspect of our life through its offspring, technology. Behind every technological development there is the foundation of science. Without science no technology is possible. It is this message that is sadly lacking in the curriculum of schools and colleges. Technology is not freely accessible to all because of intellectual property rights. But science is public property. It cannot be copyrighted. The time has come for educators and teachers in science to pay some attention to this fact and introduce reforms.

(Continued on page 582)

Vivekdisha: Knowledge in All Directions

Swami Narasimhananda and Swami Divyasukhananda

SITTING ON A ROCK at the southernmost tip of India, Swami Vivekananda ruminated on the ills India was facing. What was the way out? Was there a way out at all? Meditating on the problems he had seen in his sojourns across the nation, he realized that education was the panacea for all evils.

It was probably this realization that made him write in his letter dated 24 May 1894 to Alasinga Perumal: ‘Try to get up a fund, buy some magic-lanterns, maps, globes, etc., and some chemicals. Get every evening a crowd of the poor and low, even the Pariahs, and lecture to them about religion first, and then teach them through the magic-lantern and other things, astronomy, geography, etc., in the dialect of the people.’

A magic lantern is a basic form of slide projector. Fascinated by innovative methods of imparting information, Swami Vivekananda wanted to put them to good use in taking knowledge to the masses. He intended to spread education by using the latest technology. How thrilled he would have been at the launch of educational satellites; how much more enthused he would have been with the advent of the Internet and the unprecedented connectivity and access to information it ensures. And he would have had boundless joy on witnessing the confluence of the technologies of satellite communication and the Internet. This is what is happening at Vivekdisha, a synthesis of space science and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The Birth of Vivekdisha

As part of its efforts to reach the unreached, to uplift the rural populace on the lines of Swami Vivekananda’s teachings, the Ramakrishna Mis-

sion Vivekananda University (RKMVU) began the Vivekdisha project on 4 July 2008. The seeds of this venture were sown in December 2005, with an invitation from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) requesting the Mission to participate in its Village Resource Centre (VRC) project. An echo of the educational philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, this project envisions improving the standard of rural life in India by enhancing the quality of basic amenities and services, particularly in the fields of education, healthcare, sanitation, and empowerment through the use of space systems and information technology tools.

Vivekdisha strives to offer tele-education, tele-medicine, advisory services, and skill development programmes using the Indian Educational Satellite, EDUSAT.

While earlier satellites were capable of merely transmitting radio signals, present-day satellites are far more advanced and have an apparently unending potential. EDUSAT is a communication satellite primarily used for interactive satellite-based education. Using videoconferencing through this technology, Vivekdisha endeavours to provide multifarious need-based services suitable to local conditions. These services are designed to create avenues of income generation for the beneficiaries. Delivered timely in the local language, these services come as a ray of hope to rural people.

Presently, Vivekdisha caters mostly to the underprivileged rural populace of fourteen nodal points in the states of West Bengal and Jharkhand: Belur, Kolkata, Narendrapur, Medinipur, Purulia, Manasdwip, Cooch Behar, Khanakul, Sandeshkhali, Morabadi in Ranchi, Barwatoli, Chapatoli, Lamkana, and Gutigara. Each place has a local project centre with satellite videoconferencing equipment.

The equipment comprises camera, computer, speakers, microphone, and antenna with transmitter and receiver. Most of the centres in West Bengal have projectors to display the images received on the computer on a much larger screen. While the basic satellite connectivity and equipment have been supplied by ISRO, the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University has purchased, developed, and improvised the system to better suit its needs. Most of the activities are transmitted from the expert centre at the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University at Belur Math. The Vivekdisha centre at Ramakrishna Mission, Morabadi, Ranchi, can also transmit programmes to other centres. Most of the centres are located in remote regions very difficult to reach by common modes of transport. It is to such far-off areas that Vivekdisha diffuses knowledge to provide people the opportunity of enhancing their quality of life.

Tele-education Unfolded

In today's world education is needed for sustainable development. It encompasses a new vision of education that seeks to empower people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating and enjoying a sustainable future. Tele-education, which uses ICT to provide distance education, fulfils this new vision. As the world is becoming increasingly connected, ICT-based teaching practices in education are being extensively used and emphasized, although face-to-face meetings or synchronous interaction in real time are still required to supplement asynchronous and independent learning, if education is to become more effective. ICT facilitates a high level of interaction among students and teachers, with the aid of multimedia-based materials. Videoconferencing makes dynamic the communication between teachers and students separated in space.

In comparison to traditional classroom learning, ICT-based learning offers greater diversity of learning goals, projects, activities, and exercises. It also allows learners to make full use of their own multiple cognitive abilities and conative powers. In the ICT-based teaching-learning process teaching becomes more dynamic and both teachers and students become enthused, as access to high quality and updated study materials expands their horizons. Teachers are motivated to teach more creatively and exchange lesson plans as well as pedagogical techniques and strategies with their counterparts all over the globe even on a day-to-day basis.

Since the age of the Vedas education has been instrumental in the development of society. It holds true in today's knowledge economy as well. Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University lays special emphasis on projects that impart education for keeping children—especially the poor—intellectually stimulated, mentally focussed, and emotionally sensitive, so that they are able to develop an all-round personality endowed with the faculties of jnana, intellectual knowledge, bhakti, emotional richness, and yoga, mental concentration and focus.

What exactly happens in a tele-education scenario? A teacher gives lessons using a writing board or a computerized multimedia presentation. This is transmitted simultaneously to all centres

Vivekdisha tele-education programme in progress at Purulia



joining the programme at the university expert centre. In these branch centres the students are able to see and hear the teacher, the multimedia presentation, and other students participating in the tele-education class. Similarly, the teacher at the university can see and hear the students of all participating centres, though one centre at a time. It is a virtual classroom whose boundaries are not defined. It creates a vibrant interaction between the teacher and the students of several geographically isolated centres.

Promise of Tele-education: The Vivekdisha Experience

Students of classes six to twelve are taught physics, chemistry, mathematics, biology, computer science, value education, communicative English, and other subjects through multimedia presentations—texts, pictures, animations, visual clips, and video recordings from laboratories and operation theatres. All classes are conducted in an interactive mode in the local language. For instance, for centres in West Bengal, the language is Bengali. ICT tools like laptops, LCD monitors, and digital cameras are used to make the teaching-learning process not only more effective but also a joyful and fruitful exercise.

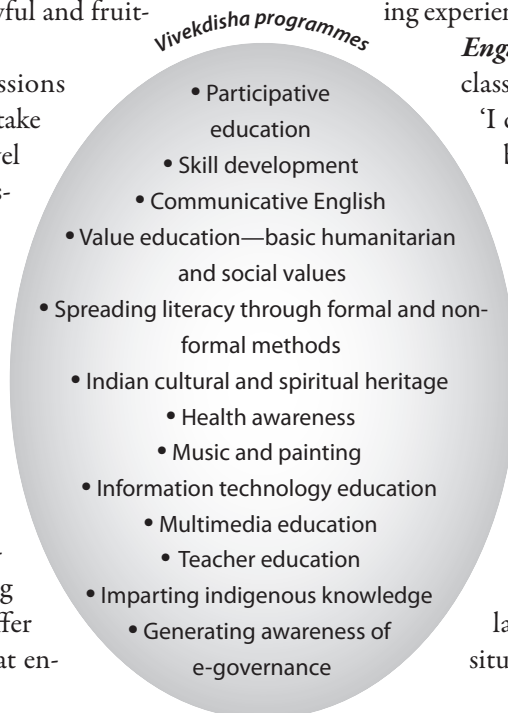
Interactions and discussions give the learners inputs that take them to a slightly higher level than the conventional classroom scenario. The technique of tackling questions and the art of writing precise and relevant answers are also highlighted with examples. Students are encouraged to ask questions till they attain a proper understanding of the topic. Teachers from different institutions including colleges and universities offer voluntary services with great en-

thusiasm. For instance, an eminent professor from the US conducts regular classes for students of undergraduate chemistry programmes. Constant feedback is received from the beneficiaries and the programme is continuously updated or modified based on student needs.

How does the use of ICT improve the quality of teaching in a virtual classroom? People working in the Vivekdisha project have experienced that ICT has the potential for increasing access to and improving the relevance and quality of teaching. This improvement in the quality of education and training is a critical issue, particularly at a time of educational expansion and rapid globalization. ICT-enhanced learning mobilizes tools for viewing actual events, analysis of information, examination, and computing, providing thus a platform for inquiry, analysis, and construction of new information by students. Learners study as they work, and learning becomes less abstract and more relevant to everyday life.

In contrast to learning by rote, ICT-enhanced learning promotes increased learner-engagement, as the student can view an experiment any number of times. This kind of study helps enrich the learning experience.

Engaging Lessons • A student of class eight, Noseda Khatun, says: 'I can now easily grasp the idea behind the topics and pictures, which I could not understand earlier.' ICT can be utilized effectively to make teaching more concrete in contrast to conventional learning through books, which often gives rise to abstract and vague ideas. Teaching of subjects like the anatomy and physiology of human organ systems or the preparation of laboratory gases and real-life situations are cases in point.



Motivation to Learn . ICT facilitates a high level of interaction among students and teachers with the aid of multimedia-based materials. Interactive multimedia engages students in the learning process, increases motivation to learn, and enables them to go deep into the subject with joy and enthusiasm.

A Picture Speaks a Thousand Words . Dipta Saha, a student of class eight, says: 'I can understand a topic much more easily by seeing pictures.' Colourful pictures can communicate a lot of information to learners and enable them to grasp ideas without much effort. Difficult concepts—the classification of plants, workings of the human heart, workings of different scientific instruments, atomic structures, and the like—are easily understood through pictures.

Achieving Visual Realism . Animation is an effective teaching tool, particularly in the life sciences and the physical sciences classrooms. It helps in achieving visual realism. Concepts like the cardiac cycle and chemical bonding and applications like the ECG are easily explained using animation.

Interactive Multimedia . ICT provides interactive multimedia as a new set of documents that can be read, written, and checked instantly. Ria Mondal, a regular student at Vivekdisha, believes that this platform provides her a better opportunity to interact with the teachers and the subjects taught.

Harnessing Student Potential . ICT allows learners to make full use of their own multiple cognitive and conative abilities. ICT-enhanced learning promotes a thematic, integrative approach to teaching and learning. This approach eliminates the artificial separation between different disciplines as well as between theory and practice, which characterizes the traditional classroom approach. The transmission of fundamental skills and concepts that are the foundation of higher

order thinking skills and creativity can be facilitated by ICT.

Practical Demonstration . Video clippings help students have a vivid idea of the workings of scientific principles, machines, and actual events like Newton's laws of motion, automobiles and computers, chromosomal movements, and DNA replication.

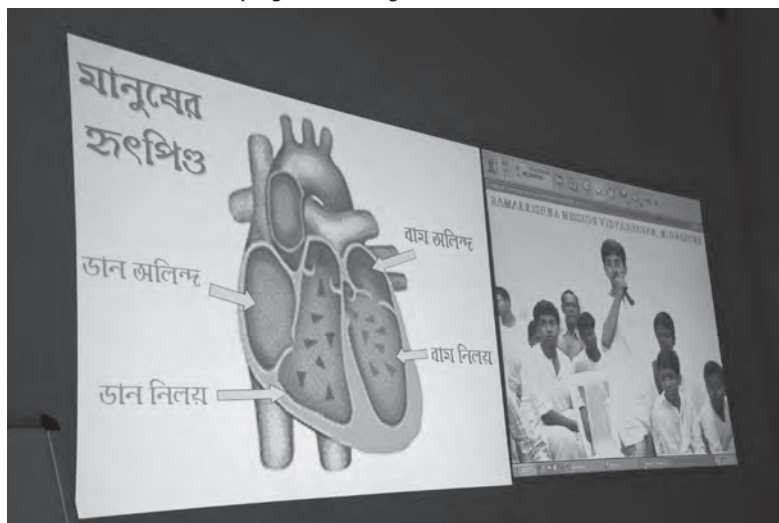
Virtual Dissection Lab . Virtual dissections of plants and animals can be carried out through computer simulation. This enables students to have a sufficient number of practice sessions without disturbing the ecological balance by killing animals or plants.

Revising Lessons . Digital cameras and videos assist students to go through their lessons as many times as necessary to clearly grasp ideas presented in the classroom. The learner is able to learn at one's own pace.

Generating Multimedia Content for Tele-education

Content generation is one of the key components of tele-education. Publications in print cannot be updated quickly while ICT-based material can be easily revised and updated, based on the feedback from learners and professionals engaged in teaching or on the actual teaching experience.

Vivekdisha tele-education programme using multimedia



At the expert centre in Vivekananda University, multimedia presentations are mostly developed in local languages to best fulfil student needs. The syllabus closely follows the curricula of local school education boards or universities. Care is also taken to motivate all categories of students to develop an inner urge to learn more and grasp the ideas presented after careful thought.

The vocational training programmes of Vivekdisha are so designed that the information provided is demand-driven and pertinent to the day-to-day life and work of rural people. This value-added information is specific to the times and geographical locations. Documentary video films in local languages on different vocations relevant to rural life—horticulture, mushroom culture, dairy, and fishery, and the like—are screened occasionally.

Telemedicine Initiative

Telemedicine technology makes it possible for doctors to examine, advise, and direct the treatment of patients in remote healthcare centres from a hospital or other established healthcare settings. This technology gives rural residents access to medical specialists who are often unavailable in remote areas

and saves the patient the cost of travelling to urban centres. The specialist service could involve general diagnosis of diseases, expert pathological opinion, as well as treatment in specialized fields like dermatology and orthopaedics. This technology can also be used to provide follow-up care for patients who have had surgical interventions. Further, it can help local doctors and non-specialists gain advanced knowledge that would enable them to offer better treatment.

The Vivekdisha telemedicine programme regularly provides treatment to patients coming to its centres in far-flung areas like Khanakul and Sandeshkhali, and occasionally to Purulia and Cooch Behar, through doctors at the Vivekananda University. The patients can talk to the doctors and explain their ailments through video-conferencing. The doctors at the university can view close-up images of the patient's affected body parts and examine them at close quarters. Most patients receive their medicines from the local Vivekdisha centres.

25 May 2009 is an unforgettable day for residents of the Sunderbans. It was on that day that Cyclone Aila struck. It devastated the land with

its cyclonic winds and high tidal waves. The cyclone left countless homeless and forced them to take shelter in relief camps to somehow survive the aftermath. Fields in low-lying regions were flooded with contaminated saline water for months. For some time it seemed as though the afflicted had nothing to eat and not a drop to drink.

On 27 May a large number of patients affected by Cyclone Aila came to the Vivekdisha centre at Sandeshkhali, Sunderbans, for treatment. All the patients interacted with doctors and received medical advice. Most of them were suffering from bruises,

A session of the Vivekdisha telemedicine programme from Belur Math



cuts, cold and cough, diarrhoea, and stomach ailments. The required medicines were sent immediately to Sandeshkhali. Apart from other relief services provided by the Ramakrishna Mission to the victims of the cyclone, Vivekdisha provided a virtual hospital for the afflicted. This is also a striking example of the usefulness of telemedicine.

Other Services at Vivekdisha

The scope for developing quality of life and rendering services to that effect is virtually endless. Besides its tele-education and telemedicine services, Vivekdisha has also taken up other programmes at its various centres. These include the following:

Vocational Training · A self-help group comprising women and a batch of enthusiastic young girls has been trained in basic computer operations to enable the members manage their own farms in a professional manner or to equip themselves for future jobs. They are receiving theoretical lessons through videoconferencing from the university expert centre, while practical training is being imparted through the computers present at the remote centre. Students of different classes are also having the opportunity to learn the basics of computer operations at different remote centres in the same manner.

Advisory Services · Experts in the fields of agriculture and animal husbandry give advice on improving cultivation methods and agricultural yield under the Vivekdisha programme to the remote villages of West Bengal and Jharkhand. A few awareness programmes have been conducted from the expert centre at Morabadi. The villagers are also made aware of modern organic farming methods and their effectiveness. During the recent attack of late potato blight in West Bengal, the farmers received timely help under this programme.

Value Education · Inculcation of higher human values, particularly in the youth, is an important objective of the Vivekdisha project. Values imbibed and practised in one's own life make life worthwhile and joyous. To inculcate

the attitude of practising higher ideals in life and to sensitize young minds right from their school days, Vivekdisha's value education programme provides multimedia presentations on the teachings of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition to students of various age groups, followed by lively interactive sessions. Emphasis is laid on placing values before students during the discussions on different topics instead of treating value education as a separate subject.

Interaction with Self-help Groups · Following Swami Vivekananda's call for self-reliance assistance to self-help groups is offered for livelihood generation and developmental projects. Expert advice on better skill development and marketing strategies are provided to members of the self-help groups.

Expert Services · Scholars and technical experts from around the globe are marshalled by Vivekdisha to enrich the project with a diverse wealth of expertise, ideas, and networks.

Indian Youth Science Congress · This conference was held from 5 to 7 June 2009 at the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute for Youth Development, Sriperumbudur. On 6 June 2009 the Khanakul centre of Vivekdisha joined in the technical session of this conference through videoconferencing. The centre made a presentation on different aspects of agricultural prosperity and food security such as home gardening for nutritional support, use of wild fruits and vegetables, and mixed cropping.

Light in the Darkness

The various remote centres suffer power cuts, especially during summer days. The classrooms in these centres are enveloped in darkness during such times. But that darkness is immediately dispersed by the glow of emergency lamps. The students still have the opportunity to study in their tele-education classrooms, interacting with teachers miles away, looking at a screen for a board. Darkness is being dispelled by the light of knowledge. Swami Vivekananda would surely have been delighted to see this dissemination of the light of knowledge that knows no bounds.



Importance of Vivekananda Study Circles in Educational Institutions

Swami Dayakarananda

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA EXPLAINS why if lessons in ethics and spirituality are given to students in their young age, society will surely achieve a higher standard at all levels: ‘Unfortunately in this life, the vast majority of persons are groping through this dark life without any ideal at all. If a man with an ideal makes a thousand mistakes, I am sure that the man without an ideal makes fifty thousand. Therefore, it is better to have an ideal.’¹ Here comes, in the context of the present institutional structures of education, the necessity of Vivekananda study circles, which enable students to know their ideals in life and mould themselves accordingly.

Vivekananda Study Circle: What It Is?

The teachers and students of many educational institutions across India have been interested to know and imbibe the ideas of Swami Vivekananda and his master Sri Ramakrishna, ideas which magnify the teachings of ancient India in the modern context. Often they decide to study together some Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature by fixing convenient times and places to assemble regularly and read and discuss pertinent literature. When these meetings are pursued with assiduity, a bond develops between its members and, in time, a Vivekananda study circle is created.

The meetings generally start with the singing in chorus of a devotional song or a hymn. Then, one of the participants reads from some of Swami Vivekananda’s works—lectures, letters, and other writings. They discuss the various issues connected with the ideas presented in the read text, particularly their relevance to daily life. Senior members

try to explain the difficult issues, supported by their knowledge and experience. Many new ideas and incidents arise during the discussions, which make these meetings all the more interesting. After this they read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* or such other books. In between they sing devotional songs or hymns to refresh their minds.

Some study circles begin their meetings with the chanting of Vedic mantras. Shlokas from the Bhagavadgita are also recited and their meaning is explained by qualified persons. The members of other circles chant together the Swadesh Mantra—taken form a lecture by Swami Vivekananda (4.479–80)—which, when sincerely contemplated upon, inspires in the youth a sense of deep respect for India’s cultural heritage and a feeling of responsibility to raise and regenerate the country.

Towards the end the participants meditate for a short while. Besides, if any service activity is conducted through the study circle, the various aspects connected with it are also discussed. Sweets and other edibles are offered at the shrine, which are later distributed as prasad—a joyful end to the meetings. These meetings create a natural bond among the members and have the effect of soothing the minds of teachers and students alike, making them thoughtful about leading a better life.

Occasionally or periodically the members of these study circles arrange special lectures on select topics by some monks of the Ramakrishna Mission or other experts, and these thought-provoking lectures undoubtedly provide great impetus to the group. Besides, the members sometimes journey together to places of pilgrimage, enjoy the holy atmosphere there, and learn about the cultural heri-

tage of India. For a while, they go beyond their routine life and are able to realize these words of Swamiji: 'This, our motherland, has religion and religion alone for its basis, for its backbone, for the bed-rock upon which the whole building of its life has been based' (3.177).

Not only have teachers and students started study circles, in many localities both elderly and young people have done the same with the aim of spreading spiritual values. Centres of the Ramakrishna Mission too run such study circles for the benefit of young people. There are also separate study circles for women, with similar objectives, at various places. Their members study the literature on Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Sister Nivedita, among other books.

Importance of the Study Circles

Studying Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature individually is no doubt of great value, but doing it in a group as is done in the Vivekananda study circles produces definite and significant benefits which will be discussed next.

First, students who have not the scope of receiving value education in their schools and colleges have the opportunity for it through these study circles, which help them know and develop the higher values of life.

Second, the discussions during question-and-answer sessions at the study circles clear many doubts that generally remain dormant if the same topics are approached through solitary readings. Moreover, discussing a book in a group generates at a time more ideas about a particular topic than when one reads all alone.

Third, all the activities of the study circle—the gathering of like-minded people, the chanting, the group study, the shrine with the fragrance of incense sticks and flowers and its serene atmosphere, the prayerful attitude of students and teachers, the service activities—together elevate the members' minds and hearts and help them improve their capacity to know and access the higher dimensions of life amidst day-to-day problems.

Fourth, studying the works of Swami Vivekananda helps develop a sincere sympathy for people in distress. And, in some of these study circles, this sympathetic feeling has further evolved into concrete service activities for the needy. During these activities the youths get a chance to come face-to-face with abject poverty and the numerous problems faced by the poor, which broaden their hearts all the more. They try to realize the all-encompassing feelings of Swamiji, which made him utter: 'The poor, the low, the sinner in India have no friends, no help—they cannot rise, try however they may. They sink lower and lower every day, they feel the blows

Expansion is life, contraction is death. Love is life and hatred is death.

—Swami Vivekananda



Vivekananda Study Circle
IIT Madras
Website: www.vsc.iitm.ac.in



A monk giving a talk at a Vivekananda study circle

showered upon them by a cruel society, and they do not know whence the blow comes' (5.14). 'Feel, my children, feel; feel for the poor, the ignorant, the downtrodden; feel till the heart stops and the brain reels and you think you will go mad' (4.367). 'Educate and raise the masses, and thus alone a nation is possible. ... The real nation who live in cottage[s] have forgotten their manhood, their individuality' (8.307). As a result, in the later years of their lives, the members of the study circles are found to spend a portion of their income and time for helping the needy.

Last, the study circle helps enhance self-awareness, mindfulness, discernment, sense of responsibility, and other character qualities. The ideas presented in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, if grasped properly, improve individuals in their own line—an engineer becomes a better engineer, a student a better student, a professional a better professional. How does this happen? The Vedantic concepts outlined in this literature instil self-confidence. Self-confidence brings awareness of what is to be done and mindfulness about what to avoid. As a consequence, the discriminating faculty becomes sharper, and with due responsibility the daily duties are performed accurately. Moreover, the noble ideas discussed in the study circles result in refined behaviour, which contributes to healthy relationships in society.

Some Study Circles

For the last several years there have been successful Vivekananda study circles in the Chennai and Kanpur campuses of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) as well as in the Bengal Engineering and Science University (BESU) at Howrah.

The Vivekananda study circle in the IIT at Chennai was started about thirteen years ago and has a good many of participants. Apart from regular study and discussions held in a hostel

every Friday, the students also meet on Sundays in a room of the institute where they have Vedic prayers, group meditation, readings from Swamiji's works, and a thirty-to-forty minute talk on an aspect of self-development or Indian culture in the contemporary context, always followed by a question-and-answer session. These Sunday gatherings are conducted by a monk of the Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, and are attended by many students and professors. Occasionally, they organize special lectures by eminent persons on themes relevant to the youth. The study circle has a well-maintained website² and a library from which books, audio-cassettes, and CDs are issued. They celebrate the National Youth Day on 12 January—the birthday of Swami Vivekananda—arrange spoken Sanskrit classes periodically, and conduct free coaching classes for economically poor students in nearby areas. The members sometimes visit various places of pilgrimage.

In the IIT at Kanpur a study circle was started about two decades ago under the name Vivekananda Samity. Besides regular gatherings, the circle's members celebrate Saraswati Puja and also render some services to the needy—coaching classes for labourers in nearby areas and the like.

In BESU a study circle was established twenty-five years ago under the name Vivekananda Youth Circle. Its members have regular meetings too and occasionally arrange special lectures and pro-

grammes that benefit other students and professors. They run a library containing a good collection of books and every year award scholarships to many economically poor students. Some years back they conducted free coaching classes for the benefit of students in need. Recently they undertook relief work among victims of the Aila cyclone in West Bengal. A few years ago the girl students of BESU started a separate study circle under the name Nivedita Study Circle.

At the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, such a study circle was started about two years ago. The Jadavpur University, Kolkata, and the IIT at Kharagpur have, in the last few years, organized such study circles. Some branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, like the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, Ramakrishna Math, Basavangudi, Bengaluru, and Ramakrishna Math, Ulsoor, Bengaluru, also run study circles for the benefit of the youth.

More Needed

The participants of these study circles have, after graduating from their educational institutions, a high professional performance, free from corruption, negligence, jealousy, and other vices; they carry out their duties responsibly and win people's hearts; they lead a simple but dignified life in their families and in society at large, thus becoming model citizens.

On the other hand, the situation of students who neither bother about improving themselves nor follow any discipline requires immediate attention. Without proper guidance during their student life, many youths get sidetracked from uprightness due to their propensities, whims, fancies, and bad company. This is a call to sincere and sensible persons who wish the modern youth to benefit from a

character-making education: by education Swami Vivekananda does not mean filling the mind with lots of facts; he rather exhorts: 'We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet.'³

The best period for imparting human values to youths is while they are in their teens; this is the time when they are more capable of imbibing values, which give tremendous energy, enthusiasm, concentration, receptivity, and purity of mind. Sri Ramakrishna says:

Why am I so fond of the boys? They are like unadulterated milk: only a little boiling is needed. Moreover it can be offered to the Deity. But milk adulterated with water needs much boiling. It consumes a large quantity of fuel.


The boys are like fresh earthen pots, good vessels in which one can keep milk without any worry. Spiritual instruction arouses their inner consciousness without delay. But it is not so with the worldly-minded. One is afraid to keep milk in a pot that has been used for curd. The milk may turn sour.'⁴

Swamiji remarks optimistically: 'My faith is in the younger generation, the modern generation, out of them will come my workers. They will work out the whole problem, like lions.'⁵

Students of the Vivekananda Study Circle, BESU, distributing books to victims of Cyclone Aila



Therefore, it will be of great personal and collective merit if the youths of today conduct and encourage study circles in their institutions. If interested students and professors can run Vivekananda study circles in institutions like the IITs, IISC, and BESU, why would it not be possible to do the same in other institutions? Surely it is possible, provided sincere interest and feeling for higher values come from within. Parents and teachers could also take the initiative to inspire youths in this direction. Someone may think that as only a small number of students in an institution can have the opportunity to participate in one of these study circles, they are not of much use on a larger scale. In reply it is

enough to mention that any movement starts only with a small number of members and then, slowly but firmly, spreads till it reaches every corner of society. Of course, for this, the founders have to be sincere to the core. 

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3. *Complete Works*, 5.342.
4. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 873–4.
5. *Complete Works*, 5.223.

Many of the Vivekananda Societies may feel that definite work for these ends [social uplift] is outside their present scope; that the true task of a student is study; that therefore the wisest course they can propose to themselves is a constant reading of books of the Swami Vivekananda, with a view to assimilating his thought and expressing it later in their own lives. Those who adopt this method are likely to encounter two difficulties.

In the first place, they will be apt to neglect the forest for the trees. In reading the *works* of Vivekananda, they are liable to forget that behind all his books, all his utterances, stands the man himself, different from each, only partially expressed through the whole mass. But it is this man himself that they really need to understand and appropriate; his triumph that they require to realise; his ringing cheer of hope and defiance that they should strive to make their own.

The second difficulty before the students is still more serious. There is a danger of turning the Swami's books into a new bondage, by treating every word of the text as sacred, and reading and re-reading constantly, till the brain is dazed and the ears are deafened and we lose all chance of understanding, even as the Christian child loses the beauty of the English Bible, or the Temple-Brahmin forgets the thrill of the Salutations. The Swami himself was a great incarnation of freedom. To sit in his presence was to experience an emancipa-

tion. He was nothing, if not a breaker of bondage. How then can a Vivekananda Society, in faithfulness to him, undertake to fasten handcuffs upon the mind? Is it not clear that only when our own thought is first active can we understand the value of his opinions and decisions? ...

A useful method of work will be found to be that of common discussion. It is only by inducing the boys to study, argue, and think out for themselves the subjects and questions proposed that we can reach a free and living knowledge. At the end of an informal conversation or formal debate, as the case may be, passages might be read from the Swami's other books, by way of ascertaining some authoritative verdict. In some such way we might hope to be secure from danger of deadening the intelligence and degrading the opinion of the Guru, by making of it a new bondage.

For he is not the greatest teacher who can tell us most, but he who leads us to ask the deepest questions. Let us then prepare ourselves to ask questions, and as we return to the Swami's own works after each month or six weeks of such intellectual excursions, we may rest assured that we shall find them more and more luminous, till at last his whole personality stands revealed to us, because we have learnt to love even as he loved, to hope as he hoped, and to believe as he believed.

—*Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, 4.383–8

Vedanta and Its Message of Fearlessness

RS Vaidyanathan

IT WAS ONLY the other day that I was reading these words of Swami Vivekananda—just a small portion indeed of his universal symphony, but inspiring enough for a teenage boy like me to ponder over:

For, if a religion cannot help man wherever he may be, wherever he stands, it is not of much use; it will remain only a theory for the chosen few. Religion, to help mankind, must be ready and able to help him in whatever condition he is, in servitude or in freedom, in the depths of degradation or on the heights of purity; everywhere, equally, it should be able to come to his aid. The principles of Vedanta, or the ideal of religion, or whatever you may call it, will be fulfilled by its capacity for performing this great function.

I started thinking what Vedanta could give me so that it made me better—better enough to face life's seemingly endless challenges. The reply too I got from Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. Out of the many practical charms that Vedanta has, three in particular appeal to me: (i) its message of fearlessness, (ii) its message of faith, and (iii) its message of service.

That Vedanta teaches fearlessness is explicitly stated by Sri Krishna to Arjuna: '*Svalpamapyasya dharmasya trayate mahato bhayat*'; even a little bit of this dharma protects (one) from great fear.' This message I also found in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*: '*Abhayam vai janaka prapto'si*'; Janaka, you have indeed achieved the state of fearlessness.'

Fearlessness is the final stage of spirituality—the Advaita stage—as the *Taittiriya Upanishad* puts it: 'When a man finds fearless support in That which is invisible, incorporeal, indefinable, and supportless, he has then obtained fearlessness. If he makes the slightest differentiation in It, there is fear for him.'


Fear is caused only by external factors. If one sees something other than oneself, then comes the possibility of fear, for one may think that there may be danger to oneself, now or in the future, by that external factor. But once one realizes that unity is the Truth and differences are just appearances, then one reaches this state of fearlessness. As a corollary of this philosophy, I found that Vedanta can be a 'great mine of strength', as Swamiji puts it, and can teach me to be fearless. I feel there will not be any objection to the point that this fearlessness instils great strength in people. Especially, this fearlessness is required for us, the youth, to face the challenges the world poses.

If we can assimilate this tenet of Vedanta, the tenet of fearlessness, there would be a tangible change in our lives. The fearlessness attained through Vedanta is not artificial, as that gained through physical strength. One becomes fearless because one has the physical strength to hit anyone one comes across; not this, the fearlessness of Vedanta is natural, the kind of fearlessness that comes when one realizes that there cannot be anything to fear of—this fearlessness is not destructive, but constructive. The fearlessness that arises out of physical strength can give

birth to hatred and malice, but fearlessness through Vedanta gives birth to increasing love, for one realizes that everything is one's own Self.


'There cannot be anything that can instil fear in me, duality is only apparent, unity alone exists. To be afraid of someone or something is just like being afraid of oneself, which is absurd, for how can I be afraid of myself?' If we can assert to ourselves in this way, then I am sure it will be of much practical help for us and others as well. To me it means much; and so it should be, I suppose, to all who search for practicality in Vedanta. A fear-smitten life we lead; so, by the application of this message in our lives, I am sure this world would be a better place for us to live in, for there will be no cause for fear anymore. As I have already mentioned, this fearlessness is constructive, giving birth to love.

We all know the good old story of the Advaitins: A rope appears to be a snake in darkness and causes fear, but when light is shed on it, one realizes that it is only a rope, and consequently fear ceases. Similarly, when the light of the knowledge of unity of things dawns, all apparent fears cease to affect us.

In conclusion, let us remember Swami Vivekananda's words: 'Strength, O man, strength, say the Upanishads, stand up and be strong. Ay, it is the only literature in the world where you find the word "Abhiih", "fearless" used again and again; in no other scripture in the world is this adjective applied either to God or to man. Abhiih, fearless!' 

(Continued from page 569)

According to a report in *India Today* of 4 May this year, Prof. C N R Rao, the former director of the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, and the current chairperson of the Scientific Advisory Commission to the Prime Minister, has made it his mission to talk science to school children. According to him, 'if children don't catch on to science at a young age, we will lose whatever scientific or technological advantage we have.' The students find his talks impressive. As one student of class nine put it, 'He makes science sound so simple.'

This is what India needs today. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was always dreaming about the day when we Indians would develop a universal scientific temper. That is possible only when we start appreciating science, not otherwise. 

(Continued from page 564)

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Swami Brahmananda

Swami Prabhavananda

(Continued from the previous issue)



THOUGH HE EMPHASIZED meditation, he did not minimize service to others. What Swamiji pointed out, Maharaj also emphasized: See Narayana—see God—and serve God in every human being.

Whenever Maharaj would show the signs that he was about to go into samadhi, he would control it and would walk; at that time nobody could approach him. The whole monastery would be shaking. Only once did I see him completely absorbed in samadhi. There was a convent run by an old holy man, who invited Maharaj to a visit. Maharaj, Swami Shivananda, Sri Ramakrishna's nephew Ramlaldada, and Maharaj's retinue, went there. There was a big hall and many young nuns. They brought a vessel of scented water to the feet of Maharaj and placed it near him. Then they began to dance, singing a song to the baby Krishna. As they were singing and dancing, they came and washed the feet of Maharaj and wiped them with their hair. Maharaj was completely absorbed in samadhi. They were singing the song to the baby Krishna and pressing a vessel of milk to his lips. But he was in samadhi. The whole place was charged with something indescribable. He brought samadhi, as it were, into the normal plane. As Shankaracharya has said beautifully: 'Our perception of the universe is a continuous perception of Brahman (though the ignorant man is not aware of this).' Try to feel this. That which you are seeking, which I am seeking, all this is really nothing but Brahman.

The relationship between Swamiji and Maharaj was unique. Whenever Swamiji wrote to Maharaj, he wrote in Bengali, 'My one unbroken heart.' I happened to find a letter that Swamiji wrote to Nivedita, which is very interesting. He wrote: 'I recommend you none—not one—except Brahmananda. That 'old man's' [Sri Ramakrishna's] judgments never failed—mine always do. If you have to ask any advice or get anybody to do your business, Brahmananda is the only one I recommend, none else, none else; with this, my conscience is clear.'

I want to tell you why almost invariably I use this chant: 'Our salutations to that Supreme Being who is one without a second.' One time I was standing by Maharaj and he was chanting that prayer with his most musical voice. When he would chant the name of God, or any prayer, it would melt any heart. So that chant stuck in my mind.

Maharaj was seated in an easy chair and Sri Ramakrishna's nephew, whom we used to call Ramlaldada, was sitting in another chair. A young man who was also a disciple but not a monk had come to visit Maharaj and was seated on the floor by Maharaj. The young man asked, 'Maharaj, tell us who you are.' And Maharaj said, 'Well, how do I know? You ask Ramlaldada.' Ramlaldada said, 'I don't know. Ask Maharaj!' I was thinking at that time, why do we have to know who Maharaj is? Then Maharaj looked at me, and I felt shy that he

The text of this article has been collated by Ms Edith Tipple from eight lectures given by the author at the Vedanta centres of Hollywood and Santa Barbara between 1961 and 1975.

was going to ask me—so I just walked away.

You read something about a man and you may form an opinion about him, but the inside feeling is something else. Again when you meet the man, when you see the man and are in his presence, what you experience is what matters. When I first saw Maharaj—I was a lad, about sixteen or seventeen years old—I felt a magnetic attraction, just as a moth would feel for fire. You couldn't resist. And such love poured forth when he looked at me!

You may ask what the general characteristic was that I felt in his presence. To put it into words would be like a dumb man having a perfect dinner and trying to describe how it tastes. What can he say? When it comes to the spiritual domain, what you feel and experience you cannot utter, it is impossible to define. The characteristic we all felt was that he hardly talked, and yet he talked about many things, not only about religion or God. It is like a girl who is in love with a boy: she may be talking about many things, but her mind is on the boy. In the same way, Maharaj's mind was in God, and one could feel that. I saw this from day to day. Every morning he would be seated in his room, where devotees, brahmacharins, and swamis would gather around him. We would have problems, but if you'd go and sit in his presence—you didn't have to tell him about your problems—when you came out, your problem would be solved. Everybody's experience was like that.

You see, religion is something that is transmitted. This is very hard to understand. We have the idea that we can learn of religion from a teacher teaching, lecturing, speaking—but that, and books, only arouse our interest. Real religion is something that is transmitted by an illumined teacher to the disciple; and that transmission is in silence, not in words. I have to convince you with reason and book knowledge, but go to a Christ and you feel the presence of God. Not only that, you feel that God is something that can be known and experienced. This man talks to God! You feel that way. And I can also talk to God. This is exactly what Maharaj made every disciple feel in his presence. There would be

no question about the existence of God, but in the presence of the exemplar of God, you'd feel that it is so easy to realize God. That is the greatest feeling I can express to you. You felt the presence of God, and you felt you could realize God for yourself if you made a little attempt. Maharaj taught the same truths that you read in the Bhagavadgita, the Bible, the Upanishads, the Quran—but when he spoke, it had a power. That is the difference. He would make us very free with him. He would make fun and tease us, and then again at times you couldn't approach him. And the whole monastery would just be shaking. And you felt he was not of this world.

Maharaj taught: 'Spiritual life begins after samadhi.' After you have the vision of God in samadhi, then you become a real benefactor to everyone. Then you can serve God in every being. You see, Maharaj pointed out how this samadhi, the supreme supernatural experience, is to be brought down, as it were, into the normal plane.

With our physical eyes what do we see but physical things, sensual things? But when you go into samadhi and attain the eye of the spirit, with that eye of the spirit you see God. And we saw that example in Maharaj. He would remain immersed in that bliss of God, and at the same time he would be very normal—he was the president of a big organization and he would conduct the work.

On one occasion Maharaj was berating me; of course, he was giving me many teachings, but I said, 'But Maharaj, I am hopeless. I can't do it. You don't help us. You only talk. You don't help us!' You know what he said? 'How do you know that we are not helping you? First try to do what I have asked you to do. Make a little attempt. Then you will realize how we are helping you.' In other words, you have to take one step, and then you will find the Lord is taking a hundred steps towards you. Self-effort is important. But ultimately it is grace.

Let me point out my own experience and how I look upon it. You see, if we think of God with his glories and almighty power, it is very difficult to approach him. But I believe God comes to us as a friend, as one amongst us. And this is how I looked

upon Maharaj. Whenever I'd be near him and any sense of awe would arise, he would say something or act in such a way that he would take away that feeling. He would be just like our own father, but more approachable than even our own friend. He used to make us laugh with his jokes. One time he said something and pointed out to another disciple, 'Look how he is laughing: he giggles like a girl.' Then he nudged me and, you know, I rolled on the ground in laughter!

Another time a devotee brought a tin of cigarettes—English cigarettes, fifty in a tin—and Maharaj asked me to keep it. I knew Maharaj didn't smoke cigarettes, so we boys finished the whole tin. The next morning when I approached him, Maharaj said, 'Hey, would you bring a cigarette for Ramlaldada?' I didn't know what to do. You see, the monastery was so far away from the shopping district that I couldn't run and buy some more, so I just stood still there, and he got the whole idea. He said, 'You see, Ramlaldada, we have a saying that the mother who is pregnant is given some special food and privileges, and she receives them in the name of the baby. But in this case, it is just the opposite: in the name of the Mother, our babies get things!'

The writer of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, M, told one of my brother disciples, 'Look at Maharaj when he is in a very light mood, when he makes fun. Watch him. Sri Ramakrishna used to do that with the young boys after he came down from the highest samadhi. Maharaj is like that, too, so watch him during those periods.'

What is it that attracted all the disciples of Maharaj? They will all say with one accord that it was his love. He was a magnet, a great attraction. One day I asked Swami Subodhananda why we felt that attraction—that Maharaj loves us more than our own parents and friends. His answer was, 'God is love, and that God is manifest in his heart. As such, you see that love, you feel that love.'

It is very difficult to recognize the greatness in the great, to recognize a holy man, unless he reveals himself. I must be frank about it, we disciples did not see as much greatness in Maharaj

as his brother disciples saw. Once Maharaj said something that I thought was just not right, but Swami Shivananda, who was also present, said, 'Yes, Maharaj.' As he came out, I said, 'You are like a yes-man to Maharaj!' You know what he answered? 'Look here. In Maharaj you see Maharaj. But what do we see? Sheathes of Maharaj—filled inside with nothing but Sri Ramakrishna. That's what we see.'

Why is that so difficult to recognize? Unless you have the longing for God and the desire for the Truth, you don't see the inner life, inner unfoldment. You can't go by externals. I'll tell you an incident. Maharaj was a guest in Balam Bose's house—he was a rich man who had oriental rugs, thick carpeting, and beautiful bedding. Maharaj used to smoke a brass hookah, which the disciples kept so polished it shone. A professor who had read the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* learned that Maharaj was staying at Balam Bose's house; so he came to visit him. Just then Maharaj's attendant, Sujji Maharaj—Swami Nirvanananda—was away. The professor walked in and saw Maharaj smoking that hookah amidst all sorts of luxury. He received a shock. He went out and sat on the porch and thought: 'This is the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna! What did I expect to see? That he would live an austere simple life. But what do I see?' Thus he was cogitating when Sujji Maharaj came back and asked him if he would like to visit Maharaj. He didn't say, 'I already went into the room.' He said, 'Yes, I came to visit him.' So he went in, and Maharaj talked to him. When he left the room, he told Sujji Maharaj, 'What a mistake I would have made if I had gone away, having received that first shock. I tried to judge a holy man with my ideas of holiness!' That professor became a devoted disciple of Maharaj.

This is what we have found out from our own experience. God and ever-free souls—Maharaj was such—are still living and helping all of us who want help. I know Maharaj is not dead, but living, and he helps whoever seeks that help. These great holy ones are bridges that unite the known with the unknown. They help us to realize that which is unknown.



Vedanta-sara

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

47. Anayoḥ samaṣṭi-vyaṣṭyor-vana-vṛkṣayor-iva jalāśaya-jalayor-iva vābhedaḥ.

This aggregate and individual ignorance are identical, like a forest and the trees or a reservoir and the water.

ALWAYS REMEMBER that the individual and the collective are made on the same plan, and the same laws work at both these levels. Just as there is subject-object consciousness and its reactions in you during the waking and dream state, and its suspension during deep sleep, similar processes happen in each living individual. With this knowledge your spiritual life will be practical.

48. Etad-upahitayor-īśvara-prājñayor-api vana-vṛkṣāvacchinnākāśayor-iva jalāśaya-jala-gata-pratibimbākāśayor-iva vābhedaḥ 'eṣa sarveśvara (eṣa sarvajña eṣo'ntaryāmy-eṣa yoniḥ sarvasya prabhavāpyayau hi bhūtānām)' ityādi śruteḥ.

As the ākāśa enclosed by the forest is identical with the ākāśa enclosed by the trees, or as the ākāśa reflected in the water is the same as the ākāśa reflected in the reservoir, similarly īśvara and prājña associated with these (aggregate and individual ignorance) are identical. There are such Shruti passages as, 'He is the Lord of all, (He is omniscient, He is the inner controller, He is the source of all, He

is the cause of the origin and destruction of creatures)' (Mandukya Upanishad, 6).

Now the author is giving an example. There is space in every individual tree, and likewise there is space in the forest as a whole. Similarly, just as there are in you three phases of illusionary personality with Reality behind them, there are also three phases with Reality behind them in the whole world. Have this consciousness; then your spiritual life will be practical. But what actually happens is that we think God is in me and the devil in the sweeper. Have this knowledge that the one God is in all, and that the play of one ignorance is seen in all.

49. Vana-vṛkṣa-tad-avacchinnākāśayor-jalāśaya-jala-tadgata-pratibimbākāśayor-vādhārabhūtānupahitākāśavad-anayor-ajñāna-tad-upahita-caitanyayor-ādhārabhūtaṁ yad-anupahitaṁ caitanyaṁ tat-turiyam-ity-ucyate '(śāntaṁ) śivam-advaitaṁ caturthaṁ manyate (sa ātmā sa vijñeyah)' ityādi-śruteḥ.

Like the unlimited ākāśa which is the substratum of the ākāśa enclosed by the forest and the trees, or of the ākāśa which is reflected in the water and the reservoir, there is an unlimited Consciousness which is the substratum of the aggregate and the individual ignorance as well as of the Consciousness (īśvara and prājña) associated with them. This is called the 'Fourth', as in such Shruti passages as, 'That which is (tranquil), auspicious, and without a second is conceived of as the Fourth aspect. (He is the Self; He is to be known)' (Mandukya Upanishad, 7).

The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda's classes on *Vedanta-sara*, conducted between 8 December 1954 and 20 January 1955. The notes—taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur—have been edited and reconstructed by Swami Brahmeshananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh.

In the state of *prājña* or deep sleep or *savikalpa samādhi* the world remains suppressed or forgotten, but it can still come up. On further illumination the world and the 'I' completely go away and only *brahmānubhūti*, the experience of Brahman, remains. Under anaesthesia the 'I' and the world disappear; but they reappear when its effect is gone. In the unconsciousness of death the 'I' and the world disappear, never to appear again in the same form.

From the statement about the transcendent *turiya*, the 'fourth' state, in the Shruti we learn that there is nothing else except God anywhere. Hence, to the extent your 'I', your ego, is reduced by spiritual practice and illumination, to that extent you will advance spiritually. On the one hand you do spiritual practice and on the other you prattle: 'I am intelligent, I have power, I have advanced'. The ego is a symptom of ignorance. It may be of any type. The statement 'I am spiritually advanced' is self-contradictory. Observe the symptoms of ignorance in yourself and know that you are a fool.

**50. Idam-eva turiyaṁ śuddha-caitanyam-
ajñānādi-tad-upahita-caitanyābhyām
taptāyaḥ-piṇḍavad-aviviktaṁ
san-mahāvākyaśya vācyaṁ viviktaṁ
sal-lakṣyam-iti cocyate.**

This pure Consciousness, which is known as the 'Fourth', when not discriminated, like a red-hot iron ball, from ignorance and the consciousness with which it is associated becomes the direct meaning of the great Vedic dictum, and when discriminated it gives us its implied meaning.

The spirit of the Shastras is now being given. The fundamental truth is that there is only pure Consciousness—Brahman alone is real. The world, the creatures, and the like are only its lila. Due to superimposition it is appearing as 'I', 'you', the world, subject-object, and the rest. You must give up your 'I', your ego, with this consciousness. Your individuality, your personality, gradually goes on disappearing, and ultimately in the *turiya* only God remains.

You must carefully and correctly understand the meaning of the *mahāvākya* 'tat-tvam-asi' in

the Shruti, its direct and implied meanings. If you take the literal meaning of the scripture, you will be ruined. For example, if you embrace a tiger considering it God, you will die. The implied meaning, *lakṣyārtha*, is that in reality there is no tiger, no father, no mother. Hence, God alone is playing in different forms. The external form is a big zero. Renounce it and merge yourself in God, the only Reality.

You are trying to feel God in temples, images, and places of pilgrimage like Kashi and Pandharpur. But they are only symbols, and to see God in them is only useful in the beginning. Ultimately you will have to experience that God is within you as well as in every creature. Struggle to realize this.

**51. Asyājñānasyāvāraṇa-vikṣepa-nāmakam-
asti śakti-dvayam.**

This ignorance has two powers, namely the power of concealment and the power of projection.

The question is, 'Why are we not able to realize Him?' Because we are in ignorance. Because of the *āvaraṇa-śakti*, power of concealment of ignorance, we are not able to see Thakur, God, even though he is our Reality existing continuously within. Feel this with great sorrow; then your spiritual practice will be intense.

**52. Āvaraṇa-śaktis-tāvad-alpo'pi
megho'neka-yojanāyatam-āditya-
maṇḍalam-avalokayitṛ-nayana-patha-
pidhāyakatayā yathācchādayatīva
tathājñānam paricchinnam-apy-
ātmānam-aparicchinnam-asamsāriṇam-
avalokayitṛ-buddhi-pidhāyakatayācchād
ayatīva tādṛśaṁ sāmāthyam. Tad-uktaṁ:
'Ghanacchanna-dṛṣṭir-ghanacchannam-
arkaṁ yathā manyate niṣprabhaṁ
cāti-mūḍhaḥ. Tathā baddhavadbhāti
yo mūḍha-dṛṣṭeḥ saḥ nityopalabdhi-
svarūpo'ham-ātmā' iti.**

Just as a small patch of cloud by obstructing the vision of the observer conceals, as it were, the solar disc extending over many

miles, similarly ignorance, though limited by nature yet obstructing the intellect of the observer, conceals, as it were, the Self, which is unlimited and not subject to transmigration. Such is this power of concealment. It is thus said: 'As the sun appears covered by a cloud and bedimmed to a very ignorant person whose vision is obscured by the cloud, so also That which to the unenlightened appears to be in bondage is my real nature—the Self, eternal Knowledge' (Hastamalaka, 10).

Sadananda gives here the example of the sun which, although so big and the giver of light to the whole world, is covered by a small cloud. Similarly, due to the limited and impermanent subject-object consciousness in you, you cannot see the infinite Reality, which is in you and in the whole world. When the wind of spiritual practice will blow, then this little ignorance will go away and the sun of God, Thakur, will shine within.

**53. Anayā āvṛtasyātmanah kartṛtva-
bhokṛtva-sukhitva-duḥkhitvādi-
saṁsāra-sambhāvanāpi bhavati
yathā svājñānenāvṛtāyām rajjvām
sarpatva-sambhāvanā.**

The Self covered by this (concealing power of ignorance) may become subject to saṁsāra (relative existence) characterized by one's feeling as agent, the experiencing subject, happy, miserable, and the like, just as a rope may become a snake due to the concealing power of one's own ignorance.

Now, the effect of the *āvaraṇa-śakti* is being mentioned. The effect is subject-object consciousness, 'I' and 'mine', and the idea that 'I am the doer', 'I am the enjoyer'. Due to this concealing power of ignorance, one has to take birth repeatedly in this painful world, saṁsāra. Since it is in you, know that you are in ignorance and undertake intense spiritual practice.

**54. Vikṣepa-śaktis-tu yathā rajjvajñāna
svāvṛta-rajjavau sva-śaktyā**

**sarpādikam-udbhāvyaty-evam-
ajñānam-api svāvṛtātmani sva-śakty-
ākāśādi-prapañcam-udbhāvyati tādrśam
sāmarthyam. Tad-uktam: 'Vikṣepa-śaktir-
liṅgādi brahmāṇḍāntam jagat srjet' iti.**

Just as ignorance regarding a rope, by its inherent power, gives rise to the illusion of a snake and the like in the rope covered by it, so also ignorance, by its own power, creates in the Self covered by it such phenomena as ākāśa and the like. Such a power is called the power of projection. It is thus said: 'The power of projection creates all from the subtle bodies to the cosmos' (Vakyasudha, 13).

Sadananda is speaking about another function of ignorance: *vikṣepa*, power of projection. Not only is Reality concealed, but in its place something else appears. Not only is the rope concealed, but in its place a snake is seen. Similarly, after concealment of Reality, the world appears. God, himself the original cause, with the help of this maya, this *āvaraṇa-śakti*, has concealed himself and with the *vikṣepa-śakti* is projecting the whole world-illusion with its gross and subtle elements. As a matter of fact, there is nothing but the one Reality, God.

This knowledge has a utility in practical life. If you do not undertake intense spiritual practice and do not concentrate intensely on the Ideal, then both the powers of maya remain active, and the world will appear more and more real to you—your mind will be dragged down more and more. So, reject the world created by maya and dive deep in the contemplation of Reality.

**55. Śakti-dvaya-vad-ajñānopahitaṁ
caitanyam sva-pradhānatayā nimittam
svopādhi-pradhānatayopādānañca
bhavati.**

Consciousness associated with ignorance, possessed of these two powers, when considered from its own standpoint is the efficient cause and when considered from the standpoint of upādhi, limitation, is the material cause (of the universe).

Brahman is being described as the efficient as well as the material cause of the universe, like a potter and the earth from which a pot is made. The efficient cause is always a conscious being, whereas the material cause is insentient matter. In the world the two causes, like the potter and the earth, are different. But the beauty here is that Brahman is both these. He is the *sraṣṭā*, Creator, as well as the various elements, gross and subtle, from which the universe is created. Brahman created from itself *māyā-śakti*, which is the material cause. To explain this Sadananda gives the example of a spider.

56. Yathā lūtā tantukāryaṁ prati svapradhānatayā nimittaṁ sva-śarīrapradhānatayopādānaṁ bhavati.

Just as the spider, when considered from the standpoint of its own self, is the efficient cause of the web and, when looked upon from the standpoint of its body, is also the material cause of the web.

The spider itself is the conscious creator of the web and is itself the material cause, because it creates the web from its own spinnerets. Ordinarily, the efficient cause—the potter—remains outside the created object—the pot. But the beauty of the world creation is that God, the Reality, the efficient cause, resides within Creation, like the spider which lives in its web.

57. Tamaḥ-pradhāna-vikṣepa-śaktimadajñānopahita-caitanyād-ākāśa ākāśadvāyur-vāyor-agnir-āpo'dbhyaḥ pṛthivī cotpadyate 'etasmād-ātmana ākāśaḥ sambhūtaḥ' ityādi-śruteḥ.

From Consciousness associated with the projecting power of ignorance, which has a preponderance of the quality of darkness, has evolved ākāśa, which in its turn has produced air, from air has come fire, from fire water, and from water earth, as is mentioned in such Shruti passages, 'From this Self has evolved ākāśa' (Taittiriya Upanishad, 2.1.1).

Sadananda now describes God's lila. The first ex-

pression of the projecting power of God is *ākāśa*, space. It comprises the three powers: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. After this, other elements evolve in their subtle form. From *ākāśa* comes air, from air fire, from fire water, and from water earth. All these contain *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* in subtle form. Since everything evolves out of these five elements, the three *guṇas* are present in everything. They manifest even in us too. When we meditate, discern, and practise self-control, and when love of God arises in us, then *sattva* predominates; when we become dynamic, egoistic, and engage in good or bad activity, *rajas* dominates; laziness and dullness is caused by *tamas*—it has the power to darken the mind. Observe this and never be proud.

58. Teṣu jādyādhikya-darśanāt-tamaḥ-pradhānyaṁ tat-kāraṇasya. Tadānīm sattva-rajas-tamāṁsi kāraṇa-guṇa-prakrameṇa teṣvākāśādiṣṭpadyante.

On account of preponderance of inertia observed in them, their cause also must have an excess of the quality of darkness (tamas). At that time the qualities of sattva, rajas, and tamas are reproduced in ether and the like, in accordance with the law that the qualities of the cause determine the qualities of the effect.

Since air evolves out of *ākāśa* the characteristic of space comes into air as well. Likewise, the characteristics of air and space come into the next element, fire. The characteristics of these three come into water, and earth gets the characteristics of all the earlier four elements as well as its own.

Observing the systematic, gradual evolution of the world illumined by Consciousness, the human being thinks that the world is real, runs after it, and suffers. In reality, all is the play, lila, of God, the master of the divine play.

59. Etānyeva sūkṣma-bhūtāni tanmātrāṇy-apañcīkṛtāni cocyante.

These are called subtle matter, rudimentary elements (tanmātras), and uncompounded (apañcīkṛta) elements.

From these subtle elements, gross elements arise. The subtle elements in uncombined form have technically three names: *sūkṣma-bhūta*, subtle matter, *tanmātra*, ‘that alone’ or rudimentary matter, and *apañcīkṛta-bhūta*, uncombined matter. When the first elements evolved, they were not mixed with one another. Gross space is a combination of the original subtle space with the other four subtle elements in a fixed proportion. This will be explained later on.

**60. Etebhyaḥ sūkṣma-śarīrāṇi
sthūla-bhūtāni cotpadyante.**

From these subtle elements are produced subtle bodies and gross elements.

From these subtle elements your subtle and gross bodies have been formed. The ear’s power of hearing and its external form have arisen from them. Similar is the case with all the senses, the mind, the intellect, and the *prāṇas*. These invisible powers are made to work by the lord of maya—*māyādhīṣa*. These seventeen components remain grouped together in the form of the subtle body. Later, the physical body arises. Therefore, everyone has a subtle personality. These subtle elements are formless particles of energy. How this grouping of elements takes place is something mysterious. Remembering this give up maya and merge in the *māyin*, the lord of maya.

**61. Sūkṣma-śarīrāṇi sapta-daśāvayavāni
līṅga-śarīrāṇi.**

The subtle bodies are what are known as the līṅga-śarīras having seventeen component parts.

**62. Avayavās-tu jñānendriya-pañcakam
buddhi-manasī karmendriya-pañcakam
vāyu-pañcakam ceti.**

The component parts (of the līṅga-śarīra) are the five organs of perception, the intellect, the mind, the five organs of action, and the five vital forces.

In the subtle body these seventeen powers, with

their respective functions, are grouped together.

**63. Jñānendriyāṇi śrotra-tvak-
cakṣur-jihvā-ghrāṇākhyāni.**

The five organs of perception are the ears, the skin, the eyes, the tongue, and the nose.

**64. Etāny-ākāśādīnāṁ sāttvikāmśebhyaḥ
vyastebhyaḥ pṛthak pṛthak
krameṇotpadyante.**

These are produced separately in consecutive order from the sattva particles of ākāśa and the rest.

Not only is the power in each element specific, but there is in each of them a preponderance of *sattva guṇa*. The combination of the *sattva* components of each element leads to the formation of the *jñānendriyas*, organs of perception.

**65. Buddhir-nāma
niścayātmikāntaḥkaraṇa-vṛttiḥ.**

Intellect (buddhi) is the modification of the internal instrument (āntaḥkaraṇa) that determines (the real nature of objects).

The intellect has the power of discernment and it illumines objects.

**66. Mano nāma saṅkalpa-
vikalpātmikāntaḥkaraṇa-vṛttiḥ.**

The mind (manas) is that modification of the internal instrument which considers the pros and cons of a subject (saṅkalpa and vikalpa).

The mind considers pros and cons.

**67. Anayor-eva
cittāhaṅkārayor-antarbhāvaḥ.**

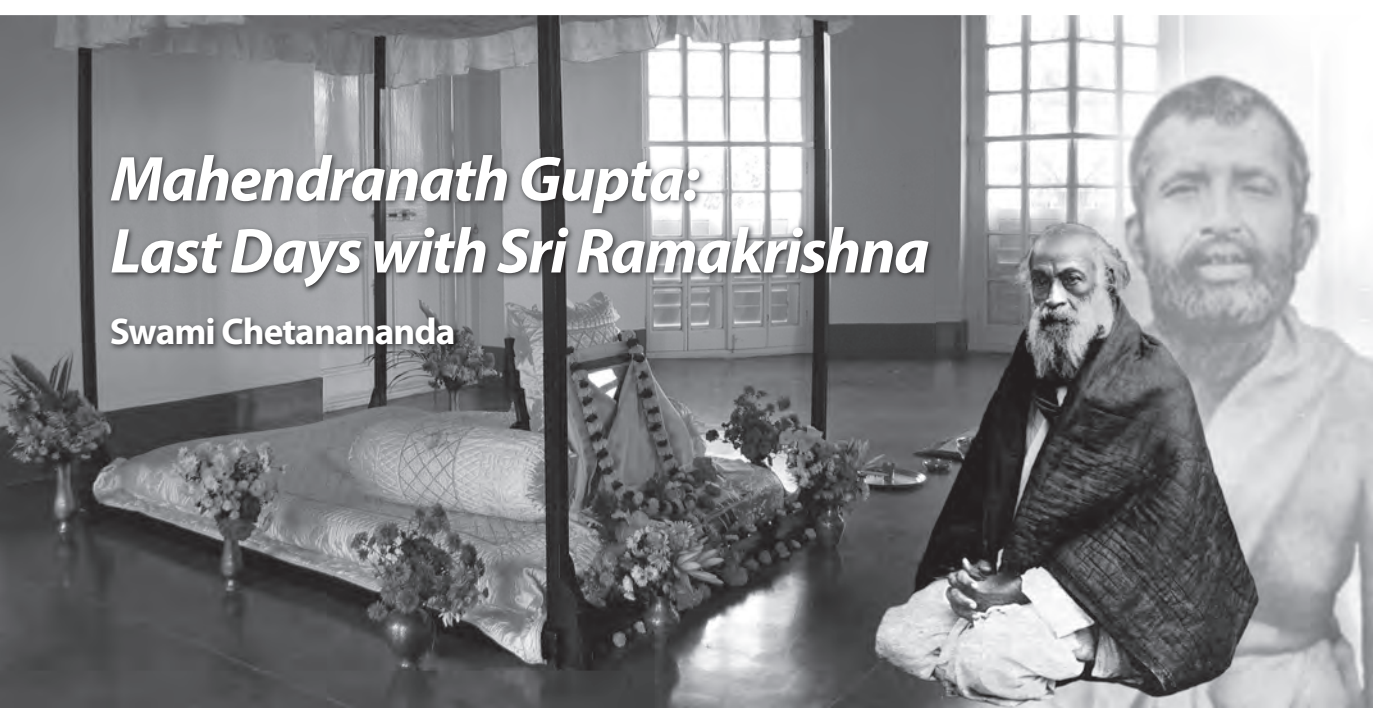
The mind-stuff (citta) and egoism (ahaṅkāra) are included in these two—[intellect (buddhi) and mind (manas) respectively].

In the context of the *āntaḥkaraṇa*, internal instrument, *manas*, mind, includes *ahaṅkāra*, egoism, and *buddhi*, intellect, includes *citta*, mind-stuff.

(To be continued)

Mahendranath Gupta: Last Days with Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Chetanananda



THURSDAY, 15 OCTOBER 1885 • It was the first day of Durga Puja. M arrived at the Shyampukur house at 4.00 p.m. and found Mani Mallick and other devotees in Sri Ramakrishna's room. The Master asked Mani to send his sister Nandini to visit him. She was a wonderful devotee and had attained *bhava samadhi* by following the Master's instructions.

Friday, 16 October 1885 • M arrived at 7.30 a.m. The Master was experiencing ecstasy because of Durga Puja. He said to Devendra: 'The whole world is absorbed in the bliss of Brahman, and I am lying in bed.' Sri Ramakrishna then began to notice the pictures in his room. He especially liked the three that depicted Gaur-Nitai, Shiva-Gauri, and Draupadi.

Saturday, 17 October 1885 • Dr Sarkar and a friend arrived and Narendra entertained them with some devotional songs. At 7.00 p.m. the Master enquired about the time and then went into deep samadhi. Dr Sarkar checked the Master's heart and his friend touched one of his eyes. There was no response. The men were dumbfounded. They admitted that science could not explain this phenomenon.

When they had left the Master told the devotees that his subtle body had gone, along a luminous path, to Surendra's shrine to see Durga and there he saw Surendra crying in front of the Divine Mother.

He asked them to visit Surendra. When the devotees arrived there, they learned that the Master's vision had been correct.

Sunday, 18 October 1885 • Despite his illness the Master had a long conversation with Dr Sarkar.⁸

Thursday, 22 October 1885 • Dr Sarkar became intrigued by the Master and began to spend time with him, as M describes in the *Gospel*:

Girish (*to the doctor, with a smile*): 'You have already spent three or four hours here. What about your patients?'

Doctor: 'Well, my practice and patients! I shall lose everything on account of your paramahansa!' (*All laugh.*)

Master: 'There is a river called the 'Karmanasa'. It is very dangerous to dive into that river. If a man plunges into its waters he cannot perform any more action. It puts an end to his duties.' (*All laugh.*)

Doctor (*to Girish, M, and the other devotees*): 'My friends, consider me as one of you. I am not saying this as a physician. But if you think of me as your own, then I am yours.' ...

(*To the Master*): 'The illness you are suffering from does not permit the patient to talk with people. But my case is an exception. You may talk with me when I am here.' (*All laugh.*)

Master: 'Please cure my illness. I cannot chant the name and glories of God.'

Doctor: 'Meditation is enough.'

Master: 'What do you mean? Why should I lead a monotonous life? I enjoy my fish in a variety of dishes: curried fish, fried fish, pickled fish, and so forth! Sometimes I worship God with rituals, sometimes I repeat His name, sometimes I meditate on Him, sometimes I sing His name and glories, sometimes I dance in His name.'¹⁰

Friday, 23 October 1885 • It was the day of the full moon, following Durga Puja, the worship of the Divine Mother. At 10.00 a.m. Sri Ramakrishna was talking to M, who was helping him with his socks. Master (*smiling*): 'Why can't I cut my woolen scarf into two pieces and wrap them around my legs like socks? They will be nice and warm.' M smiled (868).

At 11.00 a.m. M went to Dr Sarkar's house to report on the Master's condition. The doctor was very eager to hear about Sri Ramakrishna. When Dr Sarkar later came to Shyampukur, he said to the Master: 'I was much worried about you last night at three o'clock. It was raining. I said to myself: "Who knows whether or not the doors and windows of his room are shut?"' 'Really?' said Sri Ramakrishna. He was very pleased by the doctor's thoughtfulness and affection (870).

Saturday, 24 October 1885 • When Dr Sarkar arrived at 1.00 p.m. the Master praised the homeopathic system of medicine. The doctor remarked: 'According to homeopathy the physician has to check up the symptoms of the disease with the medical book. It is like Western music. The singer follows the score.'

Sri Ramakrishna wanted to have his samadhi evaluated from a scientific point of view. He said: 'Well, when I am in samadhi I feel intoxicated as if I were drunk with siddhi [drink made of Indian hemp]. What have you to say about that?' Doctor (*to M*): 'In that state the nerve centres cease to function. Hence the limbs become numb. Again, the legs totter because all the energy rushes towards the brain. Life consists of the nervous system. There is a nerve centre in the nape of the neck called the medulla oblongata. If that is injured, one may die' (876).

Narendra sang six songs at the Master's request, charming the doctor. The doctor then left.

That evening the Master went into samadhi and then slowly returned to normal. M decided to spend the night there (877-9).

Sunday, 25 October 1885 • It was about 6.30 a.m. M asked Sri Ramakrishna about his health. He was on his way to Dr Sarkar to report on the Master's condition. The Master said to M: 'Tell the doctor that during the early hours of the morning my mouth becomes filled with water and I cough. Also ask him if I may take a bath' (879). M then went to see the doctor, who came in the afternoon.

Doctor: 'I have heard the story that you were once lying on the ground unconscious in samadhi when a wicked man kicked you with his boots.'

Master: 'You must have heard it from M. The man was Chandra Haldar, a priest of the Kali temple at Kalighat; he often came to Mathur Babu's house. One day I was lying on the ground in an ecstatic mood. The room was dark. Chandra Haldar thought I was feigning that state in order to win Mathur's favour. He entered the room and kicked me several times with his boots. It left black marks on my body. Everybody wanted to tell Mathur Babu about it, but I forbade them.'

Doctor: 'This is also due to the will of God. Thus you have taught people how to control anger and practise forgiveness' (885).

Monday, 26 October 1885 • M chronicled the events of this day in the *Gospel*:

It was about ten o'clock in the morning when M arrived at the Shyampukur house on his way to Dr Sarkar to report the Master's condition.

Dr Sarkar had declared the illness incurable. His words cast gloom over the minds of the Master's devotees and disciples. With unflagging devotion and zeal they nursed the patient—their teacher, guide, philosopher, and friend. A band of young disciples, led by Narendra, was preparing to renounce the world and dedicate their lives to the realization of God and the service of humanity. People flocked to the Master day and night. In spite of the excruciating pain in his throat, he welcomed them all with a cheerful face. There seemed

to be no limit to his solicitude for their welfare. His face beamed as he talked to them about God. Dr Sarkar, seeing that conversation aggravated the illness, forbade him to talk to people. 'You must not talk to others,' the physician had said to the Master, 'but you may make an exception in my case.' The doctor used to spend six or seven hours in Sri Ramakrishna's company, drinking in every word that fell from his lips.

Master: 'I am feeling much relieved. I am very well today. Is it because of the medicine? Then why shouldn't I continue it?'

M: 'I am going to the doctor. I shall tell him everything. He will advise what is best' (886).

Dr Sarkar arrived at 1.00 p.m. and was pleased to hear that the Master was doing well. He had a long conversation with Sri Ramakrishna and the devotees.

Tuesday, 27 October 1885 • The Master was feeling better. He said to M: 'The devotee looking on himself as Prakriti likes to embrace and kiss God, whom he regards as the Purusha. I am telling this just to you. Ordinary people should not hear these things.' M: 'God sports in various ways. Even this illness of yours is one of His sports. Because you are ill new devotees are coming to you' (895).

Despite his illness, the Master continued to speak fiery words about renunciation. He ridiculed those who first make arrangements for their family and property, and then practise sadhana. Narendra's father had died, so he was trying to provide for his family.

The Master said:

When a man feels utter dispassion, he looks on the world as a deep well and his relatives as venomous cobras. Then he cannot think of saving money or making arrangements about his property. God alone is real and all else illusory. To think of the world instead of God!

A woman was stricken with intense grief. She first tied her nose-ring in the corner of her cloth and then dropped to the ground, saying, 'Oh, friends, what a calamity has befallen me!' But she was very careful not to break the nose-ring.

All laughed. At these words Narendra felt as if struck by an arrow, and lay down on the floor. M understood what was going through Narendra's mind and said with a smile: 'What's the matter? Why are you lying down?'

The Master said to M, with a smile: 'You remind me of a woman who felt ashamed of herself for sleeping with her brother-in-law and couldn't understand the conduct of those women who lived as mistresses of strangers. By way of excusing herself she said: 'After all, a brother-in-law is one's own. But even that kills me with shame. And how do these women dare to live with strangers?'

M himself had been leading a worldly life. Instead of being ashamed of his own conduct, he smiled at Narendra. That was why Sri Ramakrishna referred to the woman who criticized the conduct of immoral women, though she herself had illicit love for her brother-in-law (896).

It was 5.30 p.m. when Dr Sarkar came to the Master's room, felt his pulse, and prescribed the necessary medicine. Many devotees were present and the conversation continued for a long time. Finally the Master said to Dr Sarkar: 'If you won't take offence, I shall tell you something. It is this: You have had enough of such things as money, honour, lecturing, and so on. Now for a few days direct your mind to God. And come here now and then. Your spiritual feeling will be kindled by hearing words about God' (903).

Thursday, 29 October 1885 • M reached Shyampukur at 10.00 a.m. As usual, he collected the Master's health report and then left for Dr Sarkar's house. He and Dr Sarkar returned to Shyampukur by carriage, visiting several patients along the way. When they arrived, Dr Sarkar took the Master's pulse and enquired about his condition.

Master (*to Dr Sarkar*): 'I understand that you spoke of me as insane. That is why they (*pointing to M and the others*) don't want to go to you.'

Dr Sarkar (*looking at M*): 'Why should I call you [meaning the Master] insane? But I mentioned your egotism. Why do you allow people to take the dust of your feet?'

M: 'Otherwise they weep.'

Dr Sarkar: 'That is their mistake. They should be told about it.'

M: 'Why should you object to their taking the dust of his feet? Doesn't God dwell in all beings?'

Dr Sarkar: 'I don't object to that. Then you must take the dust of everyone's feet.'

M: 'But there is a greater manifestation of God in some men than in others. There is water everywhere; but you see more of it in a lake, a river, or an ocean. Will you show the same respect to a new Bachelor of Science as you do to Faraday?'

Dr Sarkar: 'I agree with that. But why do you call him God?'

M: 'Why do we salute each other? It is because God dwells in everybody's heart. You haven't given much thought to this subject.'

Master (*to Dr Sarkar*): 'I have already told you that some people reveal more of God than others. Earth reflects the sun's rays in one way, a tree in another way, and a mirror in still another way. You see a better reflection in a mirror than in other objects. Don't you see that these devotees here are not on the same level with Prahlada and others of his kind? Prahlada's whole heart and soul were dedicated to God.'

Dr Sarkar did not reply. All were silent. ...

It was dusk. Sri Ramakrishna became absorbed in contemplation of God. For the time being he forgot all about his painful disease. After a long time he became aware of the outer world and said to M in a whisper: 'You see my mind was completely merged in the Indivisible Brahman. After that I saw many things. I found that the doctor will have spiritual awakening. But it will take some time. I won't have to tell him much' (908-9, 911).

Friday, 30 October 1885 • M arrived at the Shyampukur house and collected the report of Sri Ramakrishna's health. He then left to pick up the doctor; they arrived at noon. As usual, Dr Sarkar had a long conversation with the Master and the devotees. The Master was grateful for his free treatment, but he was giving the doctor spirituality in return. Ignoring Dr Sarkar's high status, Sri Ramakrishna told him a harsh truth because he loved him: 'Mahindra Babu, what is this madness of yours about money? Why such attachment to wife? Why such longing for name and fame? Give up

all these, now, and direct your mind to God with whole-souled devotion. Enjoy the Bliss of God.' Dr Sarkar sat still, without uttering a word (915).

Saturday, 31 October 1885 • M arrived at 9.00 a.m. and then left to report to Dr Sarkar on the Master's health. At 11.00 a.m. Prabhudayal Mishra, a Quaker Christian, came to visit the Master. He said: 'Jesus is not the son of Mary. He is God Himself. (*To the devotees*) Now he (*pointing to Sri Ramakrishna*) is as you see him—again, he is God Himself. You are not able to recognize him. I have seen him before, in visions, though I see him now directly with my eyes.' In an ecstatic mood the Master shook hands with Mishra and blessed him, saying: 'You will get what you are seeking' (922). Dr Sarkar arrived soon afterwards and examined the Master. They had a discussion about God (923-4).

Sunday, 1 November 1885 • M arrived in the morning to visit the Master. Captain Vishwanath Upadhyay, a devotee and an officer of the Nepalese government, visited the Master. They spoke about jnana and bhakti. Prabhudayal Mishra came to bid farewell to Sri Ramakrishna, as he was leaving to perform austerities. Girish, Surendra, Devendra, Mahima, and Ramchandra arrived and the Master talked to them about longing for God.

In the afternoon M returned from work and Dr Sarkar came to see the Master. A misunderstanding had developed between Dr Sarkar and the devotees regarding taking the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet. Dr Sarkar told the Master: 'I shall not say anything to anyone. These people are angry with me.' Meanwhile Girish took the dust of the Master's feet. The doctor said: 'I have nothing to say. You people do whatever you like.' Then Narendra sang a song, and the doctor said to the Master: 'Please don't go into ecstasy. If you do, I shall leave.' Master: 'What can I do? It comes spontaneously.' Dr Sarkar examined the Master's throat and then left.

Monday, 2 November 1885 • When M arrived at 7.00 a.m., he heard that the Master's cough had become worse. Later on, at 5.00 p.m., he returned after work and the Master told him that there was blood in his phlegm. Moreover, there was a pierc-

ing pain in his throat. He said: 'This body is different from others' bodies. Sometimes I feel it will not last long. Let me awaken the consciousness of these people quickly.'

Tuesday, 3 November 1885 • The weather was cool in Calcutta. M arrived at 6.00 p.m. Dr Sarkar had not come for two days. The Master's throat had been bleeding and the devotees were concerned. Girish and Narendra left to inform the doctor of Sri Ramakrishna's condition. The Master said to M: 'Eating sattvic food is necessary for real meditation.'

Wednesday, 4 November 1885 • The Master was seriously ill. Dr Sarkar was annoyed with the devotees and had not come for the past few days. However, he came to Shyampukur at 10.00 a.m. that morning to examine the Master and prescribe medicine. He and the Master had a long spiritual conversation in which Sri Ramakrishna described the signs of an illumined soul: 'First, one experiences exuberant bliss and one's nature becomes like a child; second, one becomes calm and serene; and third, one becomes free from ego.' M left at 2.00 p.m. and returned three hours later. In the evening, when the lamps were lighted, the Master said to M: 'Now stop all your activities and think of God.'

Friday, 6 November 1885 • Dr Sarkar did not understand why his treatment was not working. He thought perhaps the change of seasons was the cause and that his remedies might be more effective when winter came.

It was Kali Puja. Following the Master's instructions, M went to the Siddheshwari Kali temple in Thanthania and made a special offering. He came back to Shyampukur with prasad

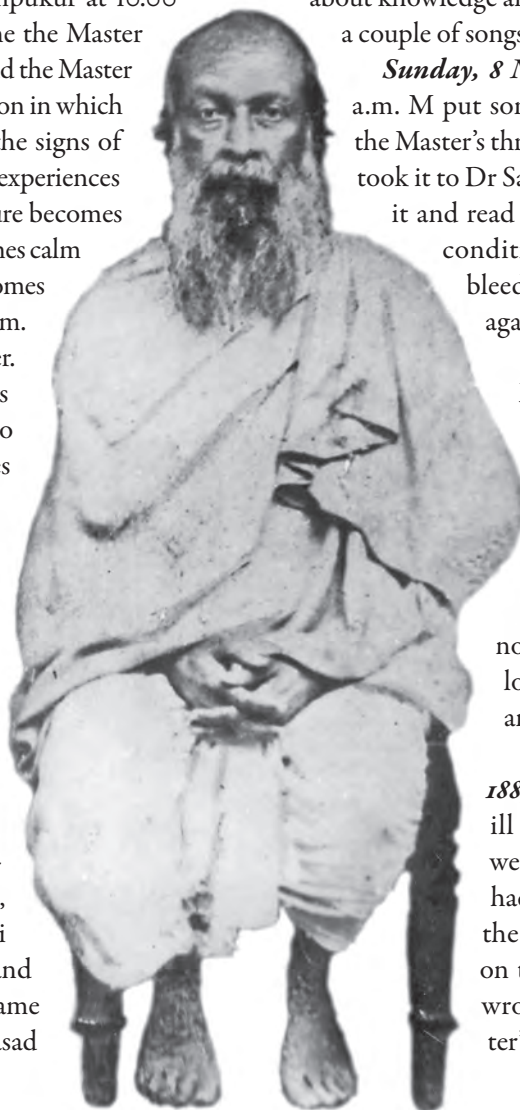
for the Master. Dr Sarkar arrived at 2.00 p.m. Girish, M, and others entertained him by singing songs praising the Mother. At 7.00 that evening the devotees offered flowers to the Master and he went into samadhi. The devotees felt the presence of the Divine Mother in Sri Ramakrishna (924-30).

Saturday, 7 November 1885 • M arrived at 2.00 p.m. and found that everyone was resting. He then went to see the Master and learned that he had not been feeling well. Dr Sarkar arrived. The Master said to him: 'There is so much bleeding from the throat! The devotees are spending so much money. I think I should return to Dakshineswar.' Dr Sarkar reassured him: 'Please don't worry.' The two men then talked about knowledge and devotion. Narendra sang a couple of songs for the doctor.

Sunday, 8 November 1885 • At 8.00 a.m. M put some blood discharged from the Master's throat into a paper packet and took it to Dr Sarkar. The doctor examined it and read M's report of the Master's condition. His throat had been bleeding the previous night and again in the morning.

Hazra came to visit the Master and the latter cheerfully told him: 'Why don't you repeat a mantra and cure my disease?' Dr Sarkar arrived that afternoon, examined the Master, and told his attendants not to worry. He did not stay long. M stayed till midnight and then left for home.

Monday, 9 November 1885 • The Master was gravely ill and the devotees' hearts were heavy. Last night he had had a lot of haemorrhage. In the morning M found blood on the Master's bed sheet. He wrote his report of the Master's condition and left for the



doctor. In the meantime Dr Pratap Majumdar came to see Sri Ramakrishna.

After making his report to Dr Sarkar, M went home and took his wife to the Pareshnath Jain temple. Dr Sarkar went to the Shyampukur house during M's absence. The Master told him: 'Your medicine is not working. I shall take Pratap's medicine.' At 3.00 p.m. M went to Dr Majumdar, who recommended that Dr Sarkar continue treating the Master. Observing the Master's condition M stayed with him that night.

Tuesday, 10 November 1885 • In the morning M went to Dr Sarkar and collected the homeopathic medicine. At noon Dr Sarkar visited the Master; M was present.

Master: 'Let me keep one hundred twenty-five percent faith in you.' The doctor was pleased. He told Sri Ramakrishna: 'Please pray to God so that we may be free from anxiety about you.' After a brief conversation the doctor left. In the evening the Master's throat haemorrhaged again and his attendants were at a loss as to what to do.

Holy Mother heard of the Master's serious condition and came from Dakshineswar to help care for him. She suggested through Sharat that someone should pour cold water on the Master's head and put a wet towel on his abdomen. Although there was no privacy, from that day on Holy Mother began to stay in a small room on the upper floor at the Shyampukur house and took responsibility for cooking the Master's meals.

Friday, 13 November 1885 • At 10.00 a.m. M observed that the Master was in a serious mood.

Girish: 'Please tell us which doctor we should call.' 'I don't know,' the Master replied. 'I have no attachment to my body.'

M gathered information for Dr Sarkar and then prepared to leave. On that day the Master had no bleeding and was not coughing, but he had a throbbing pain in his wound. He easily ate some farina pudding. Before leaving to see Dr Sarkar, M stood near the door and watched the Master eat. He wept a little as he thought of his pain.

Saturday, 21 November 1885 • It was Rasa-

purnima, the full-moon night of autumn, celebrating the night that Krishna played with the gopis. There was a festive mood in Calcutta, but the Master's condition continued to deteriorate. Girish left to see the doctor.

At 4.30 p.m. the Master's throat began bleeding and he became extremely weak. His attendants did not know what to do. Rakhal held his own head and began to cry. The Master tried to console him.

Dr Sarkar arrived. He carefully examined Sri Ramakrishna and said: 'This medicine will work. I spent the whole day researching his symptoms in my medical books.' Dr Sarkar had earlier suggested moving the Master to a spacious and clean place outside Calcutta, rather than keeping him in the polluted city. The devotees had found a house for one hundred rupees per month. M now mentioned that proposal to Narendra in front of the doctor. However, the Master overheard the plan and vehemently opposed a move to such an expensive house. M returned home with a heavy heart and could not sleep that night. He returned to the Shyampukur house when it was still dark.

Sunday, 22 November 1885 • In the morning M delivered the Master's health report to Dr Sarkar, and then he returned to Shyampukur. During lunch the Master said: 'I feel extremely uneasy.' He asked M to massage his feet and then put socks on them. When Dr Sarkar arrived, he told the Master: 'You are definitely better today.' The Master became somewhat cheerful. He walked feebly around in his room and then began to enter into ecstasy as he gazed at the picture of Mother Yashoda. He said to M: 'I feel terribly weak. My body is shaking. I feel nauseated. Shall I eat something?' Sri Ramakrishna then enquired about Niranjana and learned that he, Gopal, and Bhupati had gone to Tarakeswar to offer worship to Shiva for his recovery. He smiled.

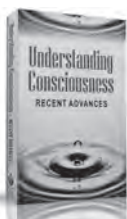
(To be continued)

References

8. *Gospel*, 850–6.
9. Literally, 'destroyer of karma'.
10. *Gospel*, 866–7.

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



Understanding Consciousness: Recent Advances

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture,
Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029. 2009.
Website: www.sriramakrishna.org.
x + 460 pp. Rs 175.

This collection makes the Institute of Culture's publications on consciousness a quartet. The previous ones focused on this area vis-à-vis a deeper scientific approach, philosophy and science, and life and mind. These volumes together constitute valuable sources for the study of consciousness, which, as the publishers rightly note in the present volume, 'is commonly invoked but imperfectly understood and contradictorily defined'. It is noteworthy that 'in recent times, apart from philosophers and psychologists who have been traditional investigators of consciousness, it has also received the attention of researchers in neuroscience, information theory, and cybernetics'.

This is a volume of the proceedings of an interdisciplinary seminar in which the organizers cast their 'net wide enough to invite as speakers not only philosophers and scientists but also mystics'. I was not sure how one identifies mystics in the papers I read. Perhaps, what is meant is enlisting the statements of 'the mystics' to either confirm or condemn such utterances. The 'mystical' aspect is certainly intriguing. But consciousness is such a speculative *pushpaka* that it can always accommodate one more analysis, whatever be the baggage of the new entrant.

Broadly, the collection can be viewed as centring on three or four interrelated, but not necessarily integral, themes. The first constitutes attempts at explanation of commonly held views on consciousness. As Professor Mukunda says in his presidential address, consciousness 'is still the unanswered question to many'. The second is the field of eclectic approaches. The third is concerned with articulation of the linguistic aspects, and has at least one paper on the interesting area of ethics and meditation and their role in the development of consciousness.

Nevertheless, there are in this well-produced volume answers that do not threaten to destroy the

inherent beauty and desirable tentativeness of the questions themselves. The most helpful and yet attractively accommodative map is provided by Swami Bhajanananda. There is a freshness in the way in which he gently, but firmly, cites links between contemporary speculations on consciousness and the insights embedded in the vast experiences of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta: with unusual clarity he states that 'the two aspects of consciousness—immanent consciousness and transcendental consciousness—both have important roles to play in human life'. This is 'the Integral knowledge (*vijñāna*)' that Sri Ramakrishna experienced and Swami Vivekananda 'applied in practical life'. In short, social activism is what results from the consciousness that balances both.

This balance is probably the vital keynote that, in one way or the other, is reflected in the volume—though unfortunately not evenly—and which, I suppose, goes beyond the familiar science-religion nexus, as Swami Vivekananda could harmonize both. But, says Swami Bhajanananda, Swami Vivekananda 'applied the principle of integral consciousness in spiritual life, and started a new movement of spiritual humanism'. Beyond social well-being, 'in spiritual humanism, human beings are looked upon as potentially Divine'.

But there are problems. As Professor L Clark Johnson argues, seminars like this give 'an opportunity for scientists to hear about methods for the exploration of subjective experience'. And the philosophers among the participants, he observes, 'are telling us that the practitioners of these methods have discovered characteristics of consciousness that are essential components of a complete description'. To achieve this, Johnson states, it is necessary to 'find a way to integrate both the objective (3rd person) methods of Western science and subjective (1st person) approaches'. Here again one faces the problem of the rigidities of science and its methods. Referring to Swami Bhajanananda's presentation on integration of knowledge and consciousness—in the 2008 volume on consciousness—the professor suggests that 'the integration of methods' may give us a satisfactory

model. However, from the tenor of the presentation I am not sure whether there will be equity in the methods. The economic and social hegemonies which mark globalization have mindsets behind them. If the so-called 'Eastern approaches' appear a bit 'smug', the Western ones are condescendingly conciliatory. Obvious or not, Eastern approaches have built-in compulsion to seek Western approval!

This is evident in Professor Anita Chatterjee's discussion on dominant metaphors and research methods, in the presentations by Professor Punita Chatterjee and the interesting views on 'Coma, Sleep and Consciousness' from the neurological perspective—phantoms-in-the-brain approach—by Professor David Bates. They all, if a sweeping generalization is permitted, either overly or covertly, suggest 'a scientific study' of consciousness—à la Dennet or Howard Gardner. On the other hand, Swami Bhajananda identifies the issue clearly: the main problem is 'to bring transcendental spiritual experience within the field of objectivity'—objectivity perceived as fulfilling 'three conditions: (i) repeatability; (ii) reportability; (iii) coherence'.

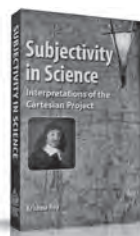
Chronologically, the attempt implicit here can be traced to the times of Sri Ramakrishna and the courteous but constant catechism he was subjected to by Dr Mahendralal Sircar, his physician and the founder of the Indian Institute for the Advancement of Science. Conceivably, the seeds of our present debates were sown during that period itself. But then, are 'transcendental experiences reportable'?

Jonathan Shear's presentation on 'Ethics, Meditation and Development of Consciousness' attempts to 'describe basic ethically-relevant experiences reported by meditation traditions throughout the world and examines their implications for ethics from the perspectives of inherent plausibility, contemporary developmental psychology, and real-world practicality'. Though this paper is illuminating in its description of criteria of credibility, the criteria themselves seem to carry subtle shadows of Western objectivity.

The Institute of Culture's 'final' volume on consciousness, I feel, should be in the area of consciousness studied exclusively, but relatively, in terms of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta, which would be a fitting tribute to the Great Master in the 175th year of his advent and a lasting contribution to consciousness studies.

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Subjectivity in Science: Interpretations of the Cartesian Project

Krishna Roy

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture. 2009. xvi + 243 pp. Rs 100.

Descartes (1596–1650) was a French philosopher-mathematician who flourished at a time when the British philosopher Francis Bacon was laying down the fundamental principles of the scientific method. Science proceeds in two ways: the inductive and the deductive. Bacon was the propounder of the inductive method, which goes from particulars to the general. The deductive method, championed by Descartes, consists in stating general laws from which specific deductions can be made. It was the genius of Newton who combined them sequentially, leading to the scientific method still in use.

Descartes is an interesting study in contradictions. He invented analytical geometry, which made the mathematical study of physics possible. At the same time, he came up with a preposterous hypothesis for the motion of the planets, making use of the concept of vortices.

Descartes's best-known work is *Discourse on Method*, which contains his famous dictum '*cogito, ergo sum*; I think, therefore I am'. This was the result of his deep reflection on the question 'How does one know anything?' It addresses the issue of perception and has given rise to the persistent controversy over mind and matter. Descartes's mechanistic view of the universe influenced not only scientists, but also philosophers. His philosophy was primarily dualistic, since the universe was supposed to consist of two elements: the created extensive matter and the soul-substance of thinking beings. This distinction set off a debate that has lasted into modern times.

Krishna Roy's book is an attempt to place the Cartesian paradigm of *cogito, ergo sum* in a contemporary perspective. This statement has been subjected to several different interpretations since Descartes's time. The author has attempted a study of this concept in the light of modern philosophical and scientific thought.

The book is divided into two parts. The first is an attempt at explaining the dictum. According to the author, Descartes's main intention was to establish science on firm foundations, and his dictum was a means towards this end. The second chapter of the

book describes how he went about doing it. The *cogito* principle tries to provide a criterion of truth. This criterion is used to reassess the relation between mind and matter, which has played a significant role in the development of physics and modern psychology.

The third chapter deals with the question whether science needs paradigms external to it for its justification. Apparently, this was the view of Descartes, since he tried to use his *cogito* principle to justify science. This issue has been hotly debated since his time. This chapter gives a brief idea of the debate. Diehard scientists are of the view that science does not need any external means for its justification. This view has, however, received a setback in modern times because of the dichotomy in quantum mechanics about the wave-particle duality of matter and radiation. Some scientists, at least, are trying to import an external factor, called consciousness, to explain this dichotomy. Descartes is now back on the scene!

Descartes also tried to found science on subjectivity. By 'subjectivity' most philosophers and scientists of today mean 'personal, conditioned, contingent, perceptual consciousness'. This is primarily due to the influence of phenomenology and existentialism, which owe so much to modern philosophers like Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and others. The second part of the book is devoted to a discussion of Descartes's influence on these philosophers. This section is rather abstruse, but the subject has been handled by the author with dexterity, a testimony to her scholarship. She has also shown how even Sartre could not escape Descartes's influence.

The book is a tribute to a neglected genius, whose name is today associated only with the Cartesian co-ordinate system. There is no denying that Descartes was a genius whose work straddled science and philosophy, and who is back on centre stage with increasingly intense debates on the interaction between mind and matter. The experiments in the Princeton University Anomalies Laboratory on paranormal phenomena in science have added grist to the mill.

The author should be complimented for her scholarly work. The value of her work would be enhanced if some discussion on the dichotomies in science and the consequential re-entry of the *cogito* principle into science were incorporated.

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Dean of Academic Programmes

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Kill Fear before Fear Kills You

J P Vaswani; Ed. Dr Prabha Sampath and Krishna Kumari

Sterling Publishers, A-59 Okhla Industrial Area, Phase II, New Delhi 110 020.
Website: www.sterlingpublishers.com.
2006. 144 pp. Rs 100.

Swallow Irritation before Irritation Swallows You

J P Vaswani; Comp. Dr Prabha Sampath and Krishna Kumari

Sterling Publishers. 2006. 176 pp.
Rs 125.

We all tend to fall prey to fear and irritation at some time or the other. These not only sap our physical and mental energy, but also keep us from realizing our full potential by corroding our lives. Usually, we are ready to face major crises and tough challenges with great courage and fortitude, but find coping with the trifling irritations and constant frustrations of day-to-day life rather difficult. How do we overcome fear and the tendency to become irritated at the slightest provocation? Dada J P Vaswani comes to our rescue. He analyses the negative feelings of fear and irritation, their genesis and root causes, and shows how harmful they can prove physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. Citing many hilarious stories and appropriate examples, Dada convinces readers that they should have the correct perspective on life and faith in divine intervention to avoid fear, annoyance, frustration, and irritation.

The author also offers useful practical suggestions to overcome fear and irritation. He exhorts us to develop confidence, a positive and serene attitude, courage, strength of character, selflessness, and compassion to bring out the best in us so that we may have control of our lives and march ahead with joy and peace.

Both the books are beautifully written and thoughtfully argued. One certainly derives inspiration and hopes to conquer fear and irritation after reading them. They are recommended to anyone who feels these negative feelings are holding them back from either daily happiness or making important changes in their lives.

Dr Chetana Mandavia

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Junagadh Agricultural University
Junagadh

REPORTS

Swami Vivekananda's 150th Anniversary

On 24 August 2010 Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, laid at Belur Math the foundation stone for the proposed building to accommodate the central office for Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary celebrations.

News from Branch Centres

On 21 July **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot**, organized a half-day seminar for young entrepreneurs, technocrats, and faculty and final year students of engineering and pharmacy colleges on 'Channelizing Youth Energy for Nation Building: A Vivekananda Perspective'. 607 delegates participated in the event.



Seminar at Rajkot

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda**, on 3 August and the gymnasium block of the ashrama's school on 9 August.



Blood donation camp at Dhaka

With the help of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, the **Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka**, organized on 27 August a blood donation camp. In total 51 persons donated blood.

Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated an additional staff quarters at **Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai**, on 8 August, the birthday of Swami Ramakrishnananda.

A new bookstall was inaugurated at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kanpur**, on 8 August.

Sri Manik Sarkar, Chief Minister, Tripura, inaugurated the senior boys' hostel building and a blood donation camp at **Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar**, on 29 August.

Relief

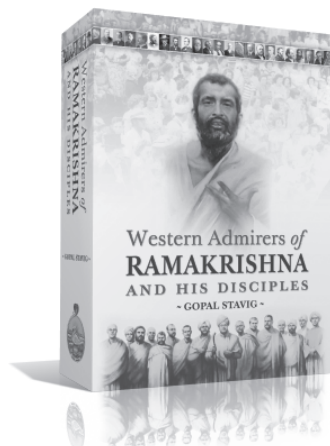
Distress Relief • **Nagpur** centre distributed 680 school uniforms, 2,020 notebooks, 680 pens, and 100 geometry boxes to economically poor students of 15 schools in 12 villages of Nagpur district. **Sargachi** centre distributed 3,750 kg fertilizer to 368 needy cultivators of nearby areas affected by the scarcity of rain.

Flood Rehabilitation • **Belgaum** centre continued the construction of 213 houses for the victims of the October 2009 flood at Gokak and Sindhanur taluks in Belgaum and Raichur districts respectively. Till August the centre had erected 93 houses up to the plinth level, 19 to the lintel level, and 84 to the roof level.



Western Admirers of RAMAKRISHNA AND HIS DISCIPLES

~GOPAL STAVIG~



This book is a meticulously researched out documentation of a large number of persons, mainly westerners, associated with Ramakrishna and his disciples and their thoughts, directly or indirectly. Their background and vocation are presented in brief, and also, in most of the cases, the accolades they showered. All this makes this work unquestionably important, both for the scholars interested in studying the western mind coming in touch with these spiritual luminaries as well as for the ordinary devotee. For the former the book is a mine of information presented precisely, and for the latter, it is an inspiring account of western admiration for Ramakrishna and his disciples and Indian thought.

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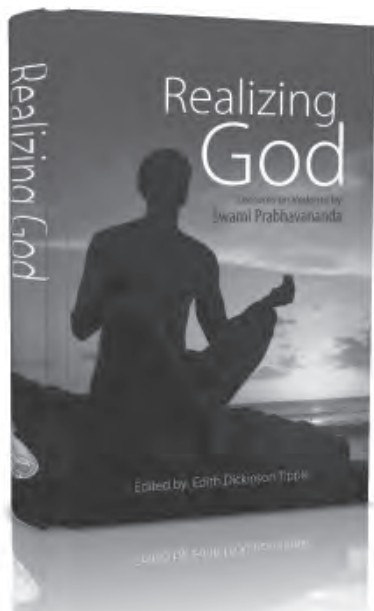
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Realizing God

Lectures on Vedanta by Swami Prabhavananda

This book has been edited from transcripts of Swami Prabhavananda's lectures and talks contained in the Archives of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. They span the years 1935-1976. From year to year, even from month to month, the swami changed content when speaking on the same topic. The lectures of the 1960s represent him at his prime. They illustrate the swami's multi-faceted thinking on any given subject.

Pages: 490 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 50 | Price: ₹ 140



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